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LADY SOURDOUGH



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Fizzy ready to start on her hundred-mile mush, Nome to Roweburg

LADY SOURDUGH

BY

Frances Ella Fitz

As told to Jerome Odlum

Illustrated

1941 · The Macmillan Company · New York

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JEROME ODLUM.

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“SOURDOUGH:—In Alaska and Pacific Northwest an experienced explorer or settler in a new, usually mining country. Colloq.”—WEBSTER

NOTE

Alaskans felt that the large amount of baking powder needed for a winter's cooking was bad for their health, so, rather than use baking powder, they made a heavy batter of flour, salt, water, potatoes, etc., and allowed it to form a yeast. This mixture was called sourdough, and each day a portion of it was used for bread, biscuits or flapjacks, after which enough new batter was added to the original mixture to keep it going. And because this mixture played so important a part in the lives of the people, anyone who spent a winter in Alaska was known as a "sourdough."

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LADY SOURDOUGH

I CAME to Nome in the late spring of 1900, a New York stenographer lured by tales of Alaskan gold. Coincidence, circumstance and plain luck had brought me there, armed with only my typewriter. And several years passed before I could decide whether that luck had been good or bad. There were times when it looked very bad indeed.

Until January of that year, I had been working in the office of the Hope Mining Company at Basin, Montana. I was the stenographer and bookkeeper, and had little contact with the actual operations of quartz mining. But I determined to learn as much as possible of the work, and presented myself at the entrance of the shaft.

"No women in here," said a miner.

"Why not? I work in the office."

"Makes no difference if you own the office, Miss Fitz. Women aren't allowed in this shaft. Bad luck."

Later, the mine superintendent explained. Superstition held that disaster would soon follow a woman's visit to a mine. And, silly as the belief was, it effectively kept me from learning much of anything of quartz mining.

A short time after this, two women applied for permission to visit the mine. They were refused, but somehow managed to sneak into the shaft. Soon after they left, fire broke out in the timbering, trapping some of the workers underground. Seven miners died in the flames—seven men whose lives, the survivors swore, had been sacrificed because two women dared flout an old and valid belief.

The fire left the shaft in ruins; the operators lost heart and sold the property for a song to Jasper Kite, a promoter who had drifted west from New York. Kite started opening the mine, but the damage was greater than he had at first thought, and he ran out of money before the task was completed.

He told me that unless he could raise several thousand dollars, he would have to close the mine and abandon his plans. This meant that I would lose my job—a good job which had already enabled me to save three thousand dollars in addition to a steady stream of money I sent home to help my mother and my brother. In the normal course of events, my work should have paid me equally as well for a number of years to come. So I lent Kite the three thousand dollars.

He hung on as long as he could, clearing away the wreckage and installing new timbers. But the money I had given him was not sufficient, and he could raise no more. When I came to work one morning in early winter, Kite had slipped away during the night and gone back to New York. Within a few weeks, Basin became almost a ghost town.

I could find no work in Montana, so there was only one thing for me to do: go back to New York while I still had money to pay my fare and expenses.

I arrived in New York with a little over a hundred dollars, but a nice room awaited me in my mother's apart-

ment, and I was unworried over the future. Something would turn up.

Though my father had been quite well-to-do, he died at a time when his fortunes happened to be at a low ebb. And from that day on, the maintenance of the home fell upon my brother Albert and me. My mother had never worked—had never so much as washed a dish—and both Albert and I vowed she never would.

Albert was a composer of popular music, but a composer's income, even in those days, was a precarious thing. Sometimes months passed without his earning a cent. Then at other times he would receive large sums from his songs. But during those lean periods it was up to Fannie Ella to produce enough money for us all—either that or we'd go without. So far, this had not happened, for the salaries paid bookkeepers and stenographers in the western towns were unusually high. Typewriters were comparatively new, and capable operators hard to find. For this reason I had gone west, where my weekly earnings exceeded the average monthly salary in New York.

Mother's apartment was in a new building at 104th and Manhattan Avenue. Albert had recently sold some songs for quite a sum of money. Both he and Mother insisted that there was plenty of room in the big apartment and no need for my immediately finding work. I could wait until something good turned up, not jump at the first thing offered. So we let matters rest like that.

Lillian Russell's mother lived directly over us, and the great actress often came there to visit. There was a stigma attached to the stage in those days, and I never spoke to Lillian, but I did peek out from behind the curtains when she called, and watched her step from her elaborate carriage, plumes bobbing and jewels twinkling. Mother and I would whisper about her, big-eyed; for Lillian's notoriety

sprang not only from her stage affiliations. . . . I wanted plumes and jewels and ease like Lillian Russell, but not in the way rumor said she had got them. Gossip kept her name continually before the public.

Unlike the girls of today, I had no stage aspirations. I had twice appeared as banjo soloist at benefits with Victor Herbert and his orchestra, but my career as an actress ended there. I wanted to earn money in the business field—wanted fiercely to earn huge amounts, which I could enjoy while I was still young. And now I became impatient at idling about New York and hoped for a shortcut to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

The winter passed quickly without my finding suitable work. By April first, my hundred dollars had shrunk to about thirty. Albert's money was dwindling, and I knew I'd have to find something very soon.

Then word trickled into the States of the gold strike at Nome. Newspapers left little to the imagination in those days. If the story failed to come up to the expectations of an editor, he changed it to suit himself. As a result, the readers saw themselves picking chunks of gold from the sands of the Bering Sea.

Before I finished the glowing account, my mind was made up.

Mother's eyes widened in horror. "But what could you, a girl hardly weighing a hundred pounds, do in that wild, unsettled country?"

"Pick up a lot of that gold and come back."

"You're too delicate for that sort of life! You could never stand the hardships and the—"

"Other women are going there with their husbands, according to the papers."

"But, you, alone! You can't do it."

"I've got to go, Mother. I'll get along."

"The newspapers," she argued desperately—"they're

never reliable. What if these stories are all false?"

"There'll be book work and typing to do in any mining camp. In Montana, the stenographers and bookkeepers made small fortunes every time a new strike developed."

Her objections continued far into the night. But my mind was made up. I was going to Alaska.

While it was true that stenographers and bookkeepers were in great demand following strikes in Montana, I knew nothing of the methods which would be followed in Alaska. At heart, I wanted to pan gold, to take my wealth right from the earth, not spend more weeks and months cooped up in a stuffy office. And if the newspaper accounts could be believed, even an inexperienced person might pan gold in Alaska. But I had my profession to fall back on if everything else failed. I could go back to stenography if gold were not there, back to the deeds and records and reports and letters of miners or merchants who swarmed in after each new strike.

But Nome lay seven thousand miles from New York, and I'd need at least five hundred dollars for passage and expenses. I had only about thirty dollars, but I set out to overcome the obstacle.

First I wrote the L. C. Smith firm in Syracuse, whom I had represented during spare time in Montana, and ordered a typewriter and other stenographic supplies, instructing them to hold the order until I gave them instructions to ship it. Now to raise money for the supplies and my passage and expenses to Alaska.

According to the newspapers, all steamers to Nome were booking passage far ahead. Overcrowding was expected. I wanted to be among the first to arrive in Alaska after the spring break-up, and hurried straight to the Great Northern ticket office to reserve passage, lest I be left behind. I deposited twenty-five dollars for a passage

on the *Santa Ana*, which was to sail from Seattle for Nome May thirtieth, one of the first ships that year.

The agent of the railroad accepted the money dubiously.

"Going all alone?"

"Yes."

He shook his head and pursed his lips and eyed the bills thoughtfully.

"Mighty dangerous business for a girl of your type all alone. Can't believe everything you read in the papers."

"I'm going just the same."

"So are thousands of others, and I don't know how they'll ever find accommodations in Nome. It's just a little place of about eight or nine hundred, and there's no telegraph to warn them that so many are coming." He looked up at me. "But of course most of these people going to Nome are men, and can take care of themselves. I don't know what a lone girl would do there. It's a wild, desolate country, completely cut off from the outside world from November till June." He shook his head. "Yet, there'll be thousands of tenderfeet going in when the ships leave."

"I'll be one of them."

"Can't scare you off, can I?" He smiled kindly. "Well, if you're going, you're going, and I suppose that's that. But just in case you land there without much money and can't find gold, is there anything else you could work at in a place like that?"

I told him of my experience in the mine office in Montana—of my experience with the typewriter, which I had once demonstrated at the Chicago Fair, when long lines of people waited at my desk for strips of paper on which I had typed, "This was written on a typewriter."

"Well," he admitted grudgingly, "I don't know just how much use there'll be for stenographers and book-



Fizzy in New York City before her Alaskan adventures

keepers in Alaska, but your experience might help some. If you couldn't find gold, you might get something to do with one of the mining companies and earn your fare back. Better yet, if you only had a little money you could join one of the big cooperative mining outfits that are getting ready to leave from New York. Then you'd be sure of a place to stay and plenty to eat and—" He interrupted himself, and his eyes brightened. "Say, that's an idea! If you don't make other plans, stop back in a few days. I'll speak to a man I know, and maybe he'll be able to work out something for you."

There were friends and acquaintances to whom I could have appealed for a loan, but that was out of the question. I was having trouble enough at home; further, I remembered the old adage about seeing your friends for advice and strangers for money. I was receiving more advice than I could use. Now to try to raise five hundred dollars.

Since my return to New York, I had learned that Jasper Kite had made a great financial success of some new venture, and now maintained large offices in Manhattan. I felt certain that he was now in a position to repay me for the help I had given him when the mine was on the verge of closing.

I phoned for an appointment, but got no further than his secretary, who asked me to hold the line for a moment, then informed me that Kite couldn't talk with me just then. Each succeeding call was a repetition of the first. And with others whom I had helped in the past, I had the same experience.

At last I returned to the Great Northern ticket agent.

"I saw the man," he said, "and he's willing to talk with you. His name's Hume, and he's an attorney with mining interests in Nome. I'll give you a letter to him."

Mother still opposed my going to Alaska, but I prevailed upon her to accompany me to Mr. Hume's quarters

in the Everett House on Madison and Seventeenth, where he occupied a suite. The attorney was in conference, but his secretary, a thin, worried little man, accepted the letter and opened it. Mother and I immediately dubbed him the Worried Little Chap.

He asked, "Which boat do you plan on taking?"

"The *Santa Ana*."

"That's one of the first, isn't it?" At first, he had seemed preoccupied. Now he quickly changed and showed great interest in me, asking who would accompany me to Nome and showing even further interest when he learned I was going alone. At the time, this did not strike me as strange.

Hume had an office in Nome, and I felt that if I could be assured of work there, I would be risking nothing by going to Alaska. If I found no gold, I could go to work.

I outlined my past experiences to the Worried Little Chap.

He hesitated, then said, "I'm sure you'll do, especially since you're leaving on one of the first ships. But I'll have to speak to Mr. Hume; then, if you'll leave me your telephone number—"

I left the Everett House greatly encouraged.

But the days slipped away, and the date of the departure of the *Santa Ana* drew closer with no word from Hume. I had had no success in raising the necessary five hundred dollars. Mother and Albert kept at me almost continually to give up the trip, to accept anything at all in New York rather than go to Alaska.

Then the Worried Little Chap phoned me and said he had arranged an interview with Mr. Hume.

Mother and I hurried to the Everett House, where I met Hume. He questioned me closely regarding my stenographic abilities and mining office experience. Toward the end of the interview, an enormously big man with

crag-like brows and humped shoulders entered the room. Hume introduced him as Mr. McKenzie, adding, "Miss Fitz is going to work in our Nome office."

McKenzie grunted, "She paying her own fare?"

"Naturally. She's already got her reservations on the *Santa Ana*."

McKenzie stared hard at me, said not another word, then passed through to another room of the suite.

But my mind was busy with my good fortune at securing work in Nome. I ignored McKenzie's lack of manners.

Hume said, "You've held responsible positions with mining companies, and I want you to know that there is responsibility here, too—probably more responsibility than you'll ever have again."

I tried to assure him that I felt capable of handling whatever they entrusted to me.

"Your responsibilities start the day you leave New York," he said. "And your handling of them en route decides whether you get the job when you reach Nome."

"I don't understand."

"I'm going to give you a letter and a package of papers to deliver to one of my partners in Nome." He paused and watched me carefully. "The letter and the papers are of vital importance. They can't be lost—can't even be trusted to the mail."

I sought to assure him of my reliability.

"Never let the letter or the papers out of your sight. Carry them everywhere you go. And deliver them only to Mr. Hubbard in person."

I tried fervently to impress him with the seriousness with which I accepted the task.

He ended the interview. "Come back the morning of the day you leave. I'll have the letter and the papers ready then."

Now I had a job waiting for me in Alaska, but no way of getting there!

I telephoned the Great Northern ticket agent.

"I've been wishing you'd come in," he said. "A man named Rowe has organized a cooperative mining company, and you may be able to work out transportation with him. He's spent the last couple of summers in Alaska, and he's about ready to set out again."

"How can I get hold of him?"

"I'll give you a note. He was in a while ago to pick up his reservations, and I told him that if he needed a secretary, you might fill the bill. He wants to see you."

Mother and I picked up the note, then hurried to Rowe's downtown hotel. We found a tall, mild-mannered, soft-spoken man with the face of a poet and the air of a country parson.

He told me that he'd be glad to have me join his party—that there were twenty-two members in addition to himself and his wife, and I would be the twenty-third.

My mother said, "Are there other women going?"

"Only my wife. But you needn't worry. There are no dangers in Alaska. My wife has spent the last two years there with me."

My mother sat back, and I recognized the look of resignation that came over her face.

"What arrangements are necessary to join the company?" I asked.

"Each member pays four hundred dollars. After we get to Alaska, and stake our claims, we split the profits—half to the company, half to the members."

"Four hundred dollars! It might as well be a million."

Rowe smiled slowly and shook his head. "That only covers transportation and the expenses of getting to Nome. I have backers here in New York who furnish the

money for supplies and equipment in Alaska. The members pay their transportation, then work for their board after we get there. Nothing else is expected of them." He paused, then asked, "Can't you raise the four hundred?"

"Not now—not from the looks of things."

He toyed with a thought for several moments and softly strummed his fingers on the desk. Then his eyes wandered to several untidy stacks of papers and correspondence.

He looked up. "You can see I'm pretty busy, trying to write letters and make out supply lists and raise money and a thousand and one other things." His hand indicated the mound of correspondence. "We leave in three days, and there's more left to do than I can possibly take care of. I won't even be able to do it if I work while we're on the train. . . . Maybe you can pitch in and help me with this typing, and in the meantime, I'll see what I can work out for you."

His voice and manners instilled confidence. And this was at least a chance. He had a rented typewriter, so on this slim arrangement, I went to work.

At intervals he questioned me. Did I have references? Couldn't I borrow the money?

I laughed. "I have good references, but money—" I described my depositing twenty-five dollars for reservations on the *Santa Ana*, then told him of my attempts to raise money, and of the typewriter and supplies waiting for me in Syracuse.

"You know," he began earnestly, "you could earn good money in Nome as a stenographer while we were getting the camp ready."

"There's a place open for me in Hubbard, Beeman and Hume's office when I get there," I said, omitting the part about the letter and the valuable papers.

"They've got some big deal on," mused Rowe.

The next day he had evidently thought things over, for now his mind was made up.

"I'm wiring Syracuse for your typewriter and supplies. You can type en route and work out your four hundred dollars that way."

Just like that! He would get a refund of my twenty-five dollars. I could take my dog Faust with me. . . . And would I bring him my references and credentials?

Would I!

He shoved a closely worded contract in front of me. "Sign here." I was too excited to read it, but he said that briefly it called for a fifty-fifty division of everything the signer earned or acquired after the company reached Alaska. In return for this, the company furnished food and housing to the signer for the term of the contract—eighteen months. If the signer broke the contract, he relinquished all interest in anything held or operated by the company. All earnings were divided equally between the company and the members.

"I'm waiving your four hundred dollars and the cost of your typewriter and supplies in lieu of your typing en route," he added.

I signed.

We traveled to Seattle by private car, and I spent most of my time pounding out letters and typing lists of supplies. Faust, half cocker, half setter, lay at my feet most of the trip. There was so much work that I had few leisure moments, but I managed to become acquainted with some of the other members of the company.

First there was Rowe himself, who, even aboard the train, continued to write exciting, glowing letters to potential backers of his Alaska expedition. From the files, I gathered some idea of the large sums he had already raised through persuasive talk and letters. In all, Rowe

must have raised and spent well over a million dollars during his years in Alaska. No one could fathom where the money went, but there was no doubt of Rowe's honesty. Every cent he got seemed to trickle through his fingers. He was always broke, always in need. Many years later, after I had left Alaska, Rowe and his wife asked me to visit them in their Seattle home. I accepted. Soon he got a call to come to New York on some mining deal. I lent him train fare, and stayed on, waiting for his return, which he had guessed would be within two weeks. Months passed with no word from Rowe—not even a letter to his wife. I stayed on and on, paying the bills, lest Mrs. Rowe and the children be evicted from their rented house. At last Rowe, as if he had been gone only a day or two, wired that his deal was completed and he was coming home. A vast sum of money accompanied the wire—enough to pay me all he owed me, including the money I had advanced for maintaining the house. When Rowe arrived, he couldn't understand my anger. He hadn't written because things had gone wrong, delaying the deal, and there was nothing else about which to write. As soon as he got the money, he sent the wire and came right home. What would have been the sense in writing?

He was an enigmatic person—neither smoked nor drank. Seldom swore, which added further to the ministerial aura that clung to him. Yet he could raise vast sums of money and get rid of them without leaving a trace faster than the most confirmed drunken gambler.

Mrs. Rowe was a quiet, mouse-like woman of about thirty-five—possibly six years Rowe's junior. She accompanied him almost everywhere he went, but I never heard her voice a word of disapproval or discontent. Rowe was her hero, her king. And the king could do no wrong. With them on this trip was an old man whom we

called Uncle Howard. He had gone with the Rowes on their two previous trips to Alaska.

Others of the party included Monty Marks, a short, heavy-set, red-headed young piano salesman from Manhattan; Ed Ferguson, brother of Elsie Ferguson the actress, a slight and delicate young medical student who still showed the ravages of a siege of malaria suffered during the Spanish-American War; Barry Keown, an athlete from New York who held twenty-five medals for physical prowess; Cecil Marks, brother of Monty and student of dentistry. There were also Pratt, a baker from Maine; Forsythe, a former dairyman; Lang, a young lawyer; Old Man Dow, a rheumatic electrician and carpenter, who, according to his growled tale, was running away from his red-headed, fiery-tempered Irish wife; Lyman, Woody, Dan Wheedon—a dozen or so others whom I never got to know very well. But each of us was about as fit to cope with the Alaskan frontier as Old Man Dow, who cursed almost continually from the pain of his rheumatism.

The trip across the country was interesting, the company congenial, and before we reached Seattle, most of the others were calling me Fizzy, an outgrowth of my last name—Fitz, Fitzzy, Fizzy.

By the time we reached Seattle, Rowe's list was completed, and we were ready to outfit the company. Nearly everyone outfitted in Seattle, but the merchants abused their privilege terribly. A buyer would select his outfit in what was presumed to be a first-class store. If the buyer happened to be the purchasing agent for a large company, the order would run into thousands of dollars. This was paid for cash in advance, with the stores assuming no responsibility for the safe arrival of the goods in Nome. The hazards of shipping necessitated this stipula-

tion, but the less scrupulous merchants took advantage of it.

A buyer would order and pay for the best grades obtainable of bacon, canned goods, flour, beans, coffee and other staples. In the furnishing stores, he bought good mackinaws, muckluks, parkas, boots, socks, underwear, blankets and other equipment. Everything was then either packed in duffle bags and ordered to the docks, or checked straight through to Alaska.

In the last-minute rush to get aboard ship, the buyer seldom had opportunity again to check his goods before they were at sea or had actually been landed on the beach at Nome. Then he discovered that inferior brands of canned goods had been substituted, that the bacon was unfit for human consumption and could be fed only to the dogs, that the clothing he had bought had been removed from the duffle bags and replaced with cheap, inferior goods.

The deSoto Company, a cooperative organization much larger than ours, ordered four thousand pounds of the highest grade navy beans—merely one item in an invoice which ran into thousands of dollars. After the beans reached Nome, they were freighted at tremendous cost to Cheenik, then up the river to Council City in boats drawn by horses. Here the company found that the beans were so old they couldn't be used. It was simply one instance in hundreds.

We arrived in Seattle at ten-thirty Wednesday evening, May twenty-third. The city was gold-mad. Adventurous gold-seekers surged up and down the crowded streets. We had not thought to wire ahead for hotel reservations, and as a consequence obtained only two rooms in the Stevens Hotel—two rooms for twenty-five people and a dog. Six of us took one room—Rowe and his wife,

Monty, Ed, Barry and me. The rest of the party slept either in the other room or on the floor in the halls. There were no cots available.

I felt sorry for poor Rowe and the boys, having to sleep on the floor, while Mrs. Rowe and I occupied the bed. But my sympathy was premature. The thought of sleeping on the floor never occurred to Rowe. When bedtime came, he simply got into bed with his wife and left me to shift for myself.

The boys had rolled up in their blankets on the floor, fully dressed. So, for the first time in my life, I spread blankets on the floor, used my coat as a pillow, and tried to get some sleep.

The next day Rowe managed to secure better hotel accommodations at the Seattle, where seven of the boys and Faust slept in a sample room, and the rest of us teamed up in rooms on the floor above. Rowe, Uncle Howard, Mrs. Rowe and I were together.

The management had offered no objection to Faust's sleeping in the sample room with the seven boys. But the next morning, I heard the dog scratching and whining outside my door.

When I let him in, he raced around the room like mad, howling and yelping and dragging his rump along the carpet. I thought at first that he must be suffering badly from worms, and gave him a basin of water. But he jumped into it with both feet, sat in it, howled in terrible agony.

I left him with Uncle Howard and ran to the sample room. No one was there, but the door stood open. As I turned to leave, Barry came down the hall.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Faust."

I told him that someone had been mistreating the dog. Barry's eyes narrowed angrily. "That porter. I saw

him coming out of the room and thought he'd been up to something. Just then Faust scooted out between his legs and ran upstairs for you."

We hurried back to the dog and found that turpentine had been injected, and in addition had been rubbed into his eyes, his mouth and his feet. He suffered terribly.

Barry ran for a veterinary. I grabbed a riding quirt which Rowe had in the room, and went after the porter.

I found him in the lobby.

"What have you done to my dog?"

He giggled and started turning from me.

I grabbed his arm. "You've nearly killed my dog!"

He shook himself from me, still giggling. It was a huge joke to him.

But his giggles stopped when I tore into him with the whip. Now he screamed in pain as I lashed him into a corner. His hands sought to protect his face, but great welts rose on his cheeks and his neck. A crowd started gathering, muttering dangerously.

Finally, the porter dodged under the whip and ran into the street. I stood in the lobby and cried.

By now the boys had learned of the porter's cruelty and flew into a murderous rage. As I sobbed in the lobby, they rushed down the stairs en masse, intent upon killing the porter. But the man had disappeared and a thorough search of the hotel failed to unearth him. After we sailed for Nome, a passenger who had been at the hotel told us that the manager, who secretly resented our having the dog in the sample room, had ordered the porter to torture Faust.*

When I obtained my refund from the Great Northern I located, in one of the New York shops, a leather coat

* This affair received much newspaper publicity, and the manager of the hotel was for years the object of scorn by the press and the hotel associations.—J. O.

which had been specially made in Paris. The coat didn't fit the person who had ordered it, and she refused to accept it. I tried it on, found that I could wear it, and decided that it would be just the thing for Alaska. There were leather leggings to match, and the original price had been seventy-five dollars, but the outfit was so unusual that another purchaser couldn't be found, so I bought it for ten dollars. The coat was of brown suede, with green suede trimmings and bone buttons. To this, I added a corduroy skirt and an Alpine hat. Mother also contributed to my wardrobe by picking up a heavy steamer coat in a Seventh Avenue shop for five dollars. The coat was full-skirted and trimmed in sable, and must originally have cost at least two hundred dollars.

Now that we were in Seattle with sailing time almost upon us, I wanted a picture of myself in my Alaska outfit. But pictures cost three dollars a dozen, and I had so little money I couldn't afford even this nominal outlay. Lyman also wanted pictures, but was pressed for cash. So we posed together, with Faust at our feet, and bought three prints each. In this manner the pictures only cost us seventy-five cents apiece.

We laughed at such poverty, when untold wealth lay only a few weeks ahead. In the fall we would all return to New York with bags of gold.

Rowe had changed my passage from the *Santa Ana* to the *Tacoma*, the ship on which he had previously made reservations. The *Santa Ana* was a small vessel, but the *Tacoma* was one of the largest plying between Seattle and Nome. And though the smaller ship was leaving a day ahead of us, we hoped that ours would overhaul it and be the first into Nome that year.

Thousands of gold-seekers waited in Seattle for passage to Nome. In May, thirty thousand of them sailed on anything that would float. They were jammed in like sar-

dines; even the big *Tacoma* was called upon to carry three hundred over its capacity.

Seven of our company, including Rowe and his wife, occupied a stateroom normally intended for two persons. And once again, Rowe slept in the bed with his wife and I curled up on the floor. But the floors of all the cabins and the dining room and the saloon were crowded with sleeping men. The steamship companies risked anything to carry the extra passengers. Old vessels were hauled from their graves, briefly reconditioned, and sent into the treacherous waters of the Bering Sea. Though our ship was in excellent condition, there were only a few lifeboats, and no more than a handful of us could escape if disaster struck. And the waters we were to travel lay thick with icebergs.

We were to have sailed at seven-thirty in the evening, but crowds of gold-seekers jammed the dock so tightly that the vessel couldn't weigh anchor until eleven that night. Everything was pandemonium. Crowds loaded with supplies and luggage surged up and down the dock. We had been warned against pickpockets and purse snatchers, so I clung to my precious package of papers like life itself.

The uproar was maddening, and the thieves found the confusion exactly to their liking. Dozens cried that they had been robbed. One old man discovered, after he got aboard, that his purse had been stolen in the jam. In it were his ticket and every cent he owned. I often wondered what became of him.

Dogs belonged in the hold, but I wanted Faust with me. At the height of the jam, I concealed him as best I could, hurried up the gangplank, and managed to sneak him into a storeroom on the hurricane deck, which had previously been fixed up as a place for some of our boys. Faust spent the entire trip in there.

The sea was smooth, the weather perfect, and everyone

looked for a pleasant trip. But the first morning out, after we'd eaten breakfast in the dining room, Ed's face suddenly paled.

He murmured something about his stomach, then hurried toward the rail. We laughed.

Barry said, "How do you like that? Not a ripple on the water and he's sick already. What's he going to do if we hit a storm?"

Within a moment or two, his own face started paling, and he followed Ed.

The rest of us looked at each other uneasily. My stomach began turning over. Everyone's face had become sickly.

"What do you suppose it is?" asked Monty. "The ship's as steady as a rock, but my stomach—" He could continue no further and rushed for the rail. I followed him and joined several score others in a well-known ritual of the sea.

In a moment, everyone felt better. None of the nausea remained which usually accompanies seasickness. But immediately after lunch our symptoms of the morning returned. Rowe and his wife were so ill they couldn't leave the stateroom.

"It's the food," Ed decided. "Nobody could get sick in this kind of weather. The food's spoiled."

A general muttering and grumbling arose. . . . The crooks even fed us tainted food because it was cheap and they could make a few more dollars. We'd be lucky if we reached Alaska alive at this rate. A person might as well take nothing but water. . . . Etc.

"Well, talking about it won't do any good," said Cecil. "We've got to figure out a way to avoid eating in the dining room."

I contacted the Chinese cook, and with money given me by Rowe, made an arrangement which kept us from the

dining room. For five dollars a day, the cook would give me enough fresh eggs to make egg-nogs for everyone in the company. We managed to obtain canned goods and bread and occasional other bits of food, and existed in this fashion until we reached Nome. After we disembarked, we learned the real cause of our illness following each meal.

The Chinese cooks, greatly overworked because of the extra passengers, deliberately doped the food with soap, so that everyone would sicken and be unable to eat. In this way, they not only kept up with their work, but also conserved on their supplies and sold them at enormous prices in Nome. . . . I thought of the bland old Chinese who daily took five dollars for eggs, and ground my teeth. The boys threatened to haunt the Nome roadstead until the *Tacoma* returned, then tar and feather the cooks.

We had been about ten days out of Seattle when the captain decided to try a new route. Like everyone else aboard ship, he wanted to be the first vessel in Nome after the break-up. Now he told us of an inner channel which would allow us to reach our destination much quicker than by following the regular lanes. There was nothing to lose and everything to gain, so he turned into the new channel, and the passengers started betting on the hour we would drop anchor outside of Nome.

The fine weather continued with a calm sea. We had passed Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands long before, and now moved between the mouth of the Yukon and Nome, about a hundred miles across Norton Sound. The Yukon lay somewhere on our right—somewhere just beyond that low horizon which obscured everything but the level sea, which was so calm it caused talk among the passengers and anxiety among the officers of the ship.

That afternoon, we learned the reason for their anxiety. A gigantic ice floe pressed down from the north,

stilling even the natural swells of the sea. The officers saw it and tried to race around it, but the ship was caught by the floe and pushed from the narrow channel into a mud flat where we went fast aground. The captain immediately flew distress signals.

The *Aberdeen*, a slower ship which had left Seattle ahead of us, but which we had passed earlier in the day, came up behind us, caught our signals, and hove to, several miles to our stern. We wig-wagged for help, but she replied she was then in only three fathoms of water and quickly reversed herself.

We passed the night fast aground, but in the morning the *Aberdeen* came around from another direction and dispatched a small boat. A junior officer boarded us, saying they could do nothing—that we were in a dangerous position and might pound to pieces if a storm came up. They would like to give us a tow, but couldn't reach us. If they got through the floe and reached Nome, they'd send the *Bear*, a revenue cutter, to help us. With that, he returned to the small boat and was pulled away.

High tides lay just ahead, with the highest of the season the following Tuesday. This was Saturday, and the crew worked all that night and the following Sunday trying to get us off the flat. Crates of fresh vegetables, chickens, pianos, and every conceivable sort of freight covered the decks. Coal lay about in improvised bunkers. One of the crew told me that if worse came to worst, all of it would have to go overboard.

We watched the skies anxiously. The appearance of a cloud roused everyone to grave concern. Each of us remembered only too plainly the words of the junior officer from the *Aberdeen*.

Monday the tide floated us a little higher than previously, but though the crew worked until three o'clock

Tuesday morning, which was still daylight at that time of year, the ship clung to the sticky mud.

Our last chance of getting off without outside help was to come that night when the highest tides of the season would reach us. If we didn't get away then, we could do nothing but hope that the *Aberdeen* dispatched help speedily from Nome. And if a storm arose in the meantime. . . . We spent many anxious hours gazing across the flat sea at the horizon beyond which lay dry land.

Early Tuesday morning, I woke to shouts from the deck.

"It's the *Bear*!" everyone was yelling.

I hurried to the rail, overjoyed that the government cutter had come. My gratitude faded when I saw only a small steam launch with a row boat trailing behind it and a number of dirty faces eyeing the *Tacoma* hungrily.

The launch tied up beside us, and nine bearded men trooped aboard—nine men, dirty and hungry and lost and out of supplies. They said that they were part of the crew of the *Mark Hunter*, a steamer which had been wrecked by an ice floe and now lay a hundred and twenty-five miles down the coast. Our crew scurried quickly about and brought food and hot coffee for the shipwrecked sailors.

"We were about ten miles off shore," said one of them, "when we piled up on the floe. There were thirty-nine of us, passengers and crew, aboard. We took them ashore, then started out in the ship's launch to find St. Michael." He shook his head and sipped at his coffee. "We thought we'd find help there. But it'd have been just too bad if we hadn't sighted you."

I asked him why.

"Out of coal and water and food. We ran out of water once before, but managed to scoop some off the top of a fresh-water floe a couple days ago."

Our captain gave them instructions on how to reach St. Michael, a small community about fifty miles farther north along the shore of Norton Sound. The nine men replenished their supplies, then prepared to leave.

Several questions were unanswered in my mind. I spoke to the sailor who told us of the marooned people.

"If you ran out of food so soon, the thirty people you left behind couldn't have had much either."

He looked at me soberly. "That's what worries us most. There's a young mother there on the beach with her two-year-old daughter."

I hesitated, then asked, "How much food did you leave them?"

"Four days."

I hated to ask it, but I had to. "How long ago was that?"

He looked at me a moment before answering. Then, "Six days." He started down the ladder to the launch.

After the little boat became a speck on the sea, the captain of the *Tacoma* called the crew and the male passengers beneath the bridge.

"There's only one thing to be done. We've got to get off this flat tonight or wait until help comes. And heaven only knows when that will be. If a storm comes up in the meantime—" He glanced at the horizon and left the sentence unfinished. "We'll have to heave all this deck freight overboard."

A man who owned a great deal of the fresh vegetables spoke up. "Even the crated food, Captain? I've got a lot of money tied up in it."

The captain answered, "Two hundred and fifty tons of that coal is my own, bought for cash in Seattle, to sell in Nome. It's going over."

The man said nothing further.

The captain completed his speech. "With the freight

off, the ship will float a little higher. I'll expect every man aboard ship to help."

They worked all day, clearing the decks completely of the precious cargo. All around us, the sea lay strewn with crates and boxes. Here the top of a crated piano showed, there the green of a shipment of lettuce, previously destined for the hard-pressed inhabitants of Nome, who went nine months of each year without fresh vegetables. Strangely, when the chicken coops went over, they were empty. Several of the birds somehow found their way into our boys' stateroom.

Gradually, the jettisoned cargo drifted away, and the water became clear. The ship's officers started giving directions for the laying of two kedge anchors. First, two small boats were launched bearing a heavy hook anchor in each. Lines from these anchors ran back to winches aboard the ship. The two boats were to pull ahead about seven or eight hundred feet and drop the anchors, one on each side of the ship. The captain's plan was that when the tide was high, he would start the ship's propellers and the two winches. When the lines tightened, the anchors would catch in the bottom of the sea, and the pull of the winches and the force of the propellers might release the ship from the mud. Ed, Monty and I had nothing to do, so we got into another small boat and rowed around while the sailors were laying the anchors.

The first one dropped without incident, but the second caught on the gunwhale of the small boat, capsizing it and throwing the sailors into the water. Monty and Ed rowed quickly to them and pulled them out and helped salvage the boat. They suffered no injuries and the day was warm, so no bad results were expected from their duck into the icy water. We returned to the ship.

At last the tide reached flood stage. The rails were lined with silently hopeful passengers.

Suddenly, the propellers started turning, and the winches roared. The vessel shuddered, but made no progress forward, so far as we could judge. . . . A vast sigh escaped from the passengers.

But the work went on continuously. First the roar of the winches, then the throb of the engines. Someone yelled that the lines running to the kedge anchors had changed position. I peered down at them. Their degree of slant seemed to have become considerably greater, as though we were almost over them. The ship was moving.

A great cheer went up. The crew slashed the lines running to the anchors. The severed ends of rope tumbled into the sea. But the captain had no choice. A stop to retrieve the valuable anchors might have meant going aground again.

We spent the rest of the night slipping along through the mud and bumping into small ice floes.


In the morning, we entered a field of floating ice. About three miles toward shore, three ships lay disabled in the ice, stuck fast in the mud. The ice pushed about them, piling up and threatening to stave them in.

The ships signaled frantically for help, but there was nothing we could do. Our ship drew twenty-two feet of water; they were in the shallows, and our small boats couldn't get through the ice to them. We signaled that we would dispatch help when we reached Nome that night. Gradually they dropped behind, became three specks in the vast field of ice.

We left the ice field. On one of the last floes, a white fox ran frantically around and around. He had been trapped when the floe broke from shore—a fate met by many a man mushing through a winter storm. Now the fox was miles at sea, and faced what he sensed was the end.

Yes, the end for the fox, but for most of us aboard the *Tacoma*, the beginning of a new life in the north.

Chapter Two

URS was the third ship into Nome after the break-up. The *Santa Ana*, though it had left Seattle a day before us and though we had been delayed on the mud flat, had not yet arrived. Rumors spread that the vessel had been trapped in an ice field and lost with everyone aboard. I believed this in horror until someone told me he'd heard the same story about the *Tacoma* and a dozen others.

There were no docks in Nome, and the ships dropped anchor three or four miles out in the roadstead. From there, in the slanting rain of an Alaskan midnight, I had my first glimpse of Nome. The beach seemed to extend for miles, and all I could see was an endless expanse of tents perched closely in the sand.

We waited for hours while the remaining freight was unloaded—for some reason the captain insisted upon performing this duty first, and the resultant confusion caused great inconvenience during the next few days. The freight was placed on large lighters, which looked like flat-bottomed river-scows, and a tug pulled them within seven or eight hundred feet of the beach. Here a

hawser was passed to the lighters, and a donkey engine, mounted in the sand, reeled in the line.

The passengers started disembarking. Soon everyone from our company but Cecil and Monty and Ed and I had gone ashore. Then a lighter lay below for us. Cecil scrambled down the perilous rope ladder and waited for me. I put Faust in a pillowcase and lowered him to Cecil, then let myself over and took my place on the lighter. Ed and Monty joined us.

Rain slanted down steadily; the lighter rose and dipped in the swell. Seventy-five people were crowded aboard, and there was neither a rail nor a lifeline to which we could cling. One man went overboard, but succeeded in scrambling back aboard. Everyone crowded toward the center of the lighter.

The tug pulled us close to shore, then passed us the hawser. The donkey engine started kicking, and we headed for the beach. Hundreds of gold-rushers lined the beach—men who had either arrived the previous year and spent the winter in Nome or who had landed from the two earlier ships.

Ed carried me ashore, then waded back through the surf for Faust and a little pup tent he had been thoughtful enough to include.

When we reached the shore, we realized how crowded conditions actually were. Tents and freight jammed the beach. We had difficulty even to walk at high tide. Waves broke just short of the tents and the piled cargo. I saw one man pay another ten dollars simply to move his small boat a little nearer to the water so the other would have room to pitch his tent.

Rowe and his wife were waiting for us. We searched carefully along the shore and found some open beach large enough to accommodate Ed's pup tent, which the boys pitched. We crawled inside, huddling together for

warmth and drawing our wet garments about us. Outside, the wind and rain beat at the canvas and the waves muttered against the shore.

Rowe said, "They've made an awful mess of that freight. It may be several days before we can locate all our stuff and set up the big tents."

I said, "If we have to stay here we won't even be able to lie down."

"I've got a friend in town—Arthur Blake, a civil engineer. He may have room for us in his shack."

Mrs. Rowe accepted her plight stoically, but I couldn't help contrasting this to the life I had known and wondering if I would have come to Alaska, had I realized it was as crude as this. But my melancholy mood passed quickly.

The tent had necessarily been pitched near the water-line. Every available foot of beach above high tide was a wilderness of ropes and guy-wires. And as the wind blew and the tide rose, the water crept higher. I heard the waves washing just outside the tent and the swish of the water meeting an oncoming breaker. Then suddenly I could feel the water. Everyone jumped up. The storm and the tide had driven the Bering Sea right into our tent!

We pulled stakes and bundled the tent and tried again to find open ground farther back from the water. But our quest was hopeless unless we tramped a mile or more down the beach, where the crowded tents thinned out. During that first, long, miserable night, we moved our tent three times.

Monty and Cecil went out looking for food. After a long time they returned with some tiny loaves of bread, which were still warm and looked more like buns than anything else.

"Real cheap, though," muttered Cecil sarcastically—"only fifty cents apiece."

"Fifty cents!" I gasped.

Rowe grinned. "That's only a hint of conditions here. . . . Remember that coal the captain had us throw overboard?"

Cecil looked down at his hands. "How could I forget it?"

"It'd have been worth a hundred dollars a ton here. He paid eight for it in Seattle."

Rowe located Arthur Blake, the civil engineer he'd mentioned the previous night. Blake, who had only a tiny one-room shack in which he lived and worked, agreed to let Rowe, Mrs. Rowe, Uncle Howard and me sleep in his even tinier loft until the rain stopped. It was the best he could offer, for he slept on a narrow bunk, and the rest of the room was jammed with the stove, some boxes, and the implements of his profession. The rest of our company shifted for themselves.

The rain lasted two more days. On the last day, Rally Marks, another brother of Cecil and Monty, joined us. Rally had just come in on the *Portland* as assistant engineer. The ship had struck an ice floe about a week out and had staved a hole in the fresh-water tanks. Panic seemed imminent, for they were hundreds of miles at sea, with no more fresh water available before they reached Nome.

In the vessel's freight cargo were fourteen horses. After the loss of the drinking water, the ship's officers decided to drive the animals overboard and let them drown humanely rather than die horribly of thirst. Two hours after the horses had been sacrificed, the *Portland* sighted a fresh-water floe and took a supply of drinking water from its top.

Rowe, Monty and Cecil located a portion of our freight, and by the time the rain ended, the boys had packed everything available of ours a mile and a half down the beach on their backs. Blake invited any of us to use his shack whenever we needed a place to stay.

The tide was down when we trekked the hard-packed sand to the distant campsite the boys had chosen. I was to follow that same trail scores of times during the next few months.

The night in the rain had given me a bad cold. I coughed incessantly. Ed hadn't yet located his medical instruments and supplies, and was unable to help me; but a doctor had hung his shingle from a near-by tent, and Ed ordered me to see the man.

The doctor greeted me a bit too eagerly, like the wolf welcoming Little Red Riding Hood. There was something about the man—his bearded face, his sleek manner—that I found instantly repulsive. His face carried a set smile, and I could hear him breathe wetly and sharply. His wild eyes didn't leave me from the moment I entered the tent.

I told him my trouble, and he started showing me to a seat. Before I could resist, he had me in his arms, and his beard was in my face. I fought against him, struck him, kicked him, and finally broke free and dashed from the tent. The boys of the company saw me running toward them and demanded to know the reason. I told them somewhat hysterically, and they set out in terrible anger for the doctor.

I was afraid that in their rage they would kill him, and hurried after them and prevailed upon them not to harm the man. But I could not stop them from pulling him from the tent, throwing him into a small boat, kicking him aboard an out-going steamer, and promising him solemnly that they would kill him the instant he again set foot in Alaska.

On the morning following our arrival in Nome, I had gone to the offices of Hubbard, Beeman and Hume, to deliver the letter and the important papers, and to secure the work which had been promised me. The offices were on the second floor of a rickety frame building, over a

store, and consisted of three rooms. There was no one in the first room and no one in the second. Desks stood about, but there were no signs of activity. As I stood hesitantly, wondering what to do, the door of the third room opened, and Hubbard stepped out to investigate whatever noise I had made.

He was a surly, dour man with a shifty eye and the thin, pinched face of a hawk. I explained myself and handed him the papers and the letter. Without comment, he turned from me and entered his office. I sat down to wait, my resentment rising at his crassness.

A half hour or forty-five minutes passed. I began worrying. At any other time when I had presented myself to go to work, my employer had been courteous and had immediately either explained my duties or turned me over to a subordinate. Hubbard let me sit.

The place seemed utterly dead, and my worries mounted. I couldn't see how this office could use a full-time stenographer. Yet Rowe knew of the firm and had suggested I go to work there immediately, retaining the position until the camp was ready and the claims staked for operation in the interior. He had explained that our company had very little cash, and everything I earned would help the common cause. Though he went no further into the matter, I realized that the company would receive half of my earnings. And this was satisfactory with me. The company had staked me to the trip and to my typewriter and supplies, and would furnish me with food and lodging during the life of the contract.

At last, Hubbard came from his office. I thought he had forgotten I was there, but he stopped, eyed me sharply, then said, "You mentioned something about working here. Hume was wrong. There's nothing for you to do. I just hired a stenographer, and there isn't enough to keep her busy."

He started from the office. I flared, "In other words, I've simply been used as a confidential messenger without pay or cost to you."

An evil gleam lighted his eyes. "You might call it that."

Burning with rage, I stormed down the steps. What to do now? I couldn't pitch in and help the boys, who would soon be freighting our supplies and equipment a hundred miles to the camp we intended establishing on the Fox river. With my five feet two and one hundred and six pounds I'd probably be more hindrance than help. I knew nothing about placer (pronounced *plass-er*) mining, but I had learned even before I reached Alaska that I couldn't simply take a pan and find gold.

Several days passed. We moved into the tents on the beach. Then I started canvassing other businesses for work. At the end of a week I had found nothing. One law firm had offered to rent me desk space on the gamble I might get some of their work. But even if I had been agreeable, I had no way of paying the initial month's rent—a slight matter of one hundred and fifty dollars!

Then I met Hubbard on the street and started to pass him, but he stopped me. I found him a changed man.

"I've been looking for you, and was hoping you'd come back."

"After the way your firm treated me—"

He laughed easily. "I'm sorry. You caught me right when I was up to my neck in a big deal. Now it's gone through, and I've got a lot of work for you. The other girl can't possibly handle it all."

It meant work and money. And I was in no position to follow my inclination and haughtily scorn him. So I accompanied him to the office.

Now the desks which I had found idle were occupied by men hard at work. Others stood about, talking seriously

and making charts on pieces of paper. The stenographer pounded furiously at her machine. An air of big undertakings hung over the place.

Hubbard took me into his office. "Tell you what I'll do. You type ten pages a day for us, and we'll give you desk space free, if you'll furnish your own desk. After that, we'll pay you forty cents a hundred words, plus a nickel for each carbon. And you can keep anything else you pick up on the side."

I calculated quickly. During the days I had tramped all over Nome, I had learned the rates charged by the stenographers. And Hubbard was offering me simply a place to set myself up as a public stenographer without salary. Perhaps his office would give me extra work; perhaps not. I could do better than that by hanging a shingle outside my own tent. Further, I knew that other typists received fifty cents a hundred words, plus ten cents for each carbon, making a minimum of three dollars and a half a page.

I objected. "At your figures, I'd be paying you thirty-five dollars a day for the privilege of placing a desk in an unused corner of your office."

He grinned thinly. "You figure pretty fast, don't you?"

"Everybody figures fast in Nome."

"What do you think would be fair?"

"I'll give you fifty dollars a week for desk space if you'll guarantee me ten pages of work a day at three and a half a page."

He stormed and argued, but I wouldn't budge. With any other prospective employer, I'd have come down. But with Hubbard, who had ignored and insulted me from the first moment I met him—

At last he agreed reluctantly. "All right. Move in your desk."

I insisted upon his signing a short agreement, then set out to find a desk. There simply wasn't one for sale in Nome at any price. I would have to hire one built.

Old Man Dow, the rheumatic carpenter of our mining company, had left for the Fox river campsite to build cabins for us, but after a little inquiry, I found a Swede carpenter in Nome. He wasn't in the least interested in work, but after I begged and pleaded for some time he reluctantly agreed to build me a rough table, nothing more, for twenty-five dollars. The price set my head swimming. Twenty-five dollars for a rough table which my mother wouldn't allow even in her kitchen. But everything was priced accordingly in Nome, the land of gold, where even a stenographer could obtain a guarantee of more than two hundred dollars a week. . . . Rowe advanced me the money, and I paid the carpenter. The table hadn't even been planed or sand-papered.

Later, when Hubbard learned that I was also a bookkeeper, he paid me equally well to keep the partnership records. Money flowed like water all over Nome. A Mr. Conway, who rented desk space in the offices of the law firm, paid me fifty dollars a month to tell people he wasn't in!

I drew very little of my earnings, as I planned to save as much of it as possible, then have an accounting with Rowe and return to New York before the freeze-up. Even Hubbard, who thought only in thousands, was somewhat startled when I left the firm in the fall. The balance due me ran into four figures. I could think in thousands too.

The story of the Nome strike had many variations, and the truth may possibly be lost in a maze of controversies. Let it suffice to say, therefore, that three alien Scandinavians, who soon became the "Three Lucky Swedes," started the Nome gold rush by filing claims on Anvil creek in the summer of 1898. Of that much, I am certain.

Within a few months after their strike, a rumor sprang up that only American citizens were entitled to hold claims to government land. This was excuse enough for many attempts to jump the Swedes' claims.

These attempted jumpings began at once, but no one got further than the posting of relocation notices. The Swedes were protecting their claims with loaded guns, and continued, during the disturbances, to take large amounts of gold from the ground. As an added precaution, they engaged Hubbard, who had formerly practiced law in the national capital and who had many high connections with government officials, to defend their interests in court.

On the other hand, the claim jumpers had retained two attorneys to push their fight: E. R. Beeman of Minneapolis, and W. T. Hume of Portland, Oregon. The case went to court, and the federal commissioner at Sitka handed down a decision against the claim jumpers. To all outward appearances, this ended the fight.

This controversy was followed, however, by the formation of a partnership by Hubbard, Beeman, and Hume.

The partners worked fast and acquired the jumper titles which had been declared invalid, then jumped every claim in the vicinity for which they had dummy jumpers to cover them. They made no distinction between alien and citizen holders of claims. Hubbard then went to Washington, D. C., where he contacted McKenzie, a politician of the Dakotas who had close connections with the administration. Using these jumped claims, the pair formed a mining company, and disposed of tens of thousands of dollars' worth of stock.

Hubbard returned to Nome for the winter, but Beeman and Hume remained outside. With Alexander McKenzie, they completed their plot, then came to New York, where I entered the picture by approaching them for work.

Through McKenzie's connections in Washington, he arranged to have Arthur H. Noyes appointed judge of the newly created Judicial District of Alaska. Hume reached Nome early in July. McKenzie and Judge Noyes arrived two weeks later—about the twentieth. Now two more characters joined the group, an attorney named Dudley Dubose, and Joseph K. Wood, United States District Attorney.

McKenzie immediately assumed charge of everything. He ordered Judge Noyes, who was putty in his hands, to appoint him, McKenzie, receiver for the claims which were in litigation—the same claims which had been used to form the mining company in Washington.

The judge obeyed, and McKenzie, as receiver, was required to post bond of only five thousand dollars, whereas many of the disputed claims were producing up to fifteen thousand dollars a day.

Instead of ordering these claims shut down while they were in litigation—for the original stakers, alien or otherwise, had immediately started actions to recover their claims—McKenzie evicted the owners and seized everything on the properties, even gold which had been taken from other claims and which was simply being stored on the contested property. Then McKenzie hired every available laborer to work the claims at top speed. As receiver, he took all the clean-ups and gave practically no accounting of the gold, which he presumably placed in a safety deposit vault in the Alaska Bank and Safe Deposit Company.

The Swedes, through new attorneys, were trying to obtain relief through Judge Noyes, but they didn't have a chance. The court of appeals was in San Francisco, and Noyes did only as McKenzie ordered. Each appeal the Swedes made he denied. And daily the gold poured from the claims.

During this time I was working fifteen hours a day in the law firm's office. McKenzie and his associates seemed to have gone mad. They continued to secure claim after claim under jumper titles, which necessitated the typing of papers to be served on the original stakers. There was no end of the typing that summer.

The other girl in the office, whom I'll call Rose Chambers since she was as ignorant as I of what was taking place, worked on salary for the lawyers, and, fortunately for me, hated typing. On the other hand, I disliked taking shorthand. So we made a good team.

Rose would take the dictation, then read her notes to me, and I would type them. In this manner, she drew her regular salary, and I, at times, earned as much as a hundred dollars a day. Money poured in so fast and in such huge amounts that my bills for typing meant almost nothing to the lawyers. They were interested only in speed—in the typing of papers which brought them more and more money. And I, being gullible and of an unsuspecting nature, failed to realize what was actually taking place. Further, McKenzie seemingly had the law on his side: Judge Noyes and Joe Wood, who were all the law there was in lawless Nome. So I gave him the speed he wanted.

The firm's offices expanded to five rooms, one of which served as McKenzie's private office. He had seemed large when I first met him in New York; but now, in these low-ceilinged, cramped rooms, he loomed above everything else like some great animal which paced back and forth in its cage, crying eternally for speed and more speed. The words he used most when addressing me were, "Hurry up! I've got to have that right away!" As a rule, he had just handed me some typing which couldn't possibly have been finished in less than an hour.

He demanded that he be given an interest in the firm,

and he got it without argument. Now his word became absolute law; daily he drew up more papers to serve on the hard-pressed miners, who, with winter coming on and no money in their pockets, began to become unruly. Talk of mob action against Judge Noyes, who had again ruled against them, was heard. United States troops, stationed nearby, were held in readiness.

Judge Noyes maintained his office in a small frame building near ours. Here he held court. When he wasn't in court or his chambers, he was usually at Hubbard, Beeman and Hume's. He drank to some extent, but most of his drinking was done either in his chambers or in the offices of my employers, and he never frequented a saloon, possibly in the belief that it would be beneath his dignity!

But the judge kept his thoughts assiduously to himself. He seldom spoke to anyone other than McKenzie. During one trying period, when, from three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon until the following Monday afternoon at four, I worked only three feet from his desk, he addressed not a word to me, though he was present all of this time during business hours. I might add that I left the office only long enough to eat.

The power of McKenzie was so great that he could even hold large steamers hours beyond their sailing time while I typed papers which had to sail with them. During the two unbroken days of work, when the judge sat only three feet from me without speaking, I was working on papers which had to be in San Francisco. The *Tacoma* was held four hours while I completed the task. In those days, the typewriter was not the feather-touch little machine of today. Instead, it was a large, cumbersome affair with keys as stiff as a gas engine on a cold morning. When I completed the papers that Monday, the keys were smeared with blood, my fingers raw.

Nearly all of the country was in litigation. Winter lay

just ahead, and the miners whose claims had been tied up saw there was little chance of recovering them without a long drawn-out court fight. A group of them called on Judge Noyes. He became very nasty in addressing the miners. He was the Law. His word was might.

The miners flew into a rage. Someone produced a rope. I watched the angry men from the windows of my office as they dragged the judge into the street and tossed the rope across a building beam. Everyone was yelling, "Hang 'im! String 'im up!"

White-faced and shaken, McKenzie stood beside me and stared down into the street.

The nearby troops saved Judge Noyes at the last moment. But even this demonstration failed to stop the greedy pair. They continued taking gold from the claims at top speed. The miners saw no relief in sight, and, held back by the soldiers, gathered in angry knots and talked of forming a group of vigilantes.

At this time, Charles D. Lane, president of the Wild Goose properties, was a number of miles from Nome at one of the company's claims on a subsidiary of Anvil creek. Lane, formerly a leading California mining man, was known as the champion of the underdog. McKenzie had stepped carefully insofar as Lane's claims were concerned, but some of the miners suggested getting in touch with Lane, advising him of affairs and asking him to use his influence with the California courts in their behalf.

There was no public telephone system or telegraph line out of Nome, but Lane's company had strung a private line from Anvil to the claim where Lane was now working. The vigilantes rode to Anvil and telephoned Lane. He came to them posthaste, investigated thoroughly, and decided to aid the miners.

Through Lane, the cases reached Judge William W. Morrow, an honest justice of the United States Circuit

Court of Appeals in San Francisco. McKenzie had overstepped when he jumped *in alien* (to coin a word) claims and put the owners from the properties. Wood and Dubose gathered with McKenzie in the office. I sat at my desk and heard the mutterings and buzzings as the men sought to evade whatever punishment lay in store.

McKenzie said, "We'll save every ounce of it. I'll get it now."

They left the office *en masse*, leaving me alone with the other girl. A mob of miners had gathered outside. They set up an angry roar when the three men stepped to the street.

I hurried down the stairs, intent upon seeing events close at hand. By the time I reached the street, all had disappeared except McKenzie, upon whom the storm of objection was now being heaped. The mob followed him down the street, threatening him with hanging.

He broke into a run, and the mob picked up speed. Troops sought to hold back the miners, but were shouldered into the street. At the bank, the officials locked the heavy doors behind McKenzie.

The roar of the vigilantes died to an angry muttering, a muttering which swelled and grew until it dwarfed its former volume. A stone sailed from the street. It was the first drop of rain before a storm. Men scrambled frantically about, grabbing anything they could lift and heaving it through the windows of the bank. Glass thundered down. The mob pushed closer. Some of the soldiers tried to hold the miners back, but the mob closed around the troops like lava imprisoning a lone tree.

Stout shoulders battered against the door of the bank. Miners tried to fight their way through the broken windows, and came away bloodily gashed, or fell to the street as chairs and stools were wielded by the embattled bank employes.

Reserve troops arrived at last and surrounded the bank. An officer warned the assembled miners that their cases were in the hands of the United States Court at San Francisco—that they would either disperse and wait for the law to take its course or he would order his men to fire. The more sober-minded of the enraged miners prevailed upon the others to drop their attack.

Lane speeded up proceedings. The Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco dispatched U. S. Deputy Marshal Freid with papers to serve on Judge Noyes, calling for the delivery of the gold in the vaults to the original stakers, and the return to the former owners of title to the claims. McKenzie, secure in the power he wielded in Washington, ordered the judge to ignore the court's order. Freid returned to San Francisco. Another month would now pass before the court's next action could become known. Judge Noyes placed troops around the bank.

When my employers ignored the court's order, I knew it was time for me to get out. I resigned the following morning. The balance due me was about five thousand dollars, but the lawyers were too preoccupied over their own difficulties to haggle with me.

During the month which was required for the deputy marshal to return to San Francisco and come back to Nome, McKenzie continued his operations without let up. Lack of any outside communication, aside from the steamers, gave him a free hand.

It ended in the middle of October, when United States marshals arrived with a warrant for McKenzie's arrest and an order demanding that he produce the gold which had been taken from the claims in litigation. McKenzie refused to open the vault, and turned the keys over to Joe Wood.

Lacking a court order, the marshals could not order the bank to open its vaults. But Judge Morrow's marshals

from San Francisco didn't let a little thing like that stop them. The miners were again threatening to lynch all the principals in the controversy; further, the miners were out of money and hungry, and winter lay just ahead. So the marshals broke down the doors of the vault, but a bitter disappointment awaited them. Of all the gold which had been mined, only a fraction remained.

The marshals divided the remaining gold among the rightful owners, ousted the jumpers from the properties, and returned each claim to the original staker. But justice was lax, the long arm of political pull muscular. McKenzie, Noyes and Wood were tried for contempt of court for refusal to obey the writ of Judge Morrow's court, and Dubose was tried for advising his client to disobey one of such orders. McKenzie eventually received only a year's jail sentence, but was pardoned after serving a small portion of it. Dubose and Wood received smaller sentences. Judge Noyes got off with a thousand-dollar fine.*

The Latins had a name for it—*ad astra per aspera*. Or as we'd say today, what a racket!

* I have written this account as it was given to me by Miss Fitz. No effort has been made by me to check upon this, since it is her story that interests us, not what can be gleaned from old records.—J. O.

Chapter Three

THERE had been nothing glamorous about Nome when I saw it that first stormy June midnight in 1900. A few small frame structures rising drably above a city of sodden tents. Anvil Peak, a bald foothill, hanging in the background like an evil menace. And rain, rain, rain.

The land between the foothills and Nome was a stretch of utter desolation. No tree relieved the monotony. A hold-over of the Ice Age still gripped the ground, relenting only in the summer when it permitted the surface to thaw. Then it became a quagmire, a sinking morass, a trap for men and horses alike. The more it was traveled, the more impassable it became. Lichens and reindeer moss disguised it in varying shades of white and scarlet and unexciting gray.

Only in the winter, when the cold of the Ice Age reached up from the ground and joined the Arctic air and made solid footing of the tundra, was travel without discomfort possible. But when the summer sun got in its work, the brief withdrawal of winter came grudgingly—a fight for every inch of the retreat, with here and there

a stubborn outpost holding out until the reinforcements of cold weather arrived, and the tundra again became a solid mass.

These outposts, protected from the sun by thick growths of the white though coral-like reindeer moss and the lichen, remained like hard, slippery domes in the mire left by the retreating ice. Travel became almost impossible. The outposts, which were called niggerheads, gave only a slippery and precarious footing. Around these niggerheads the ground seemed bottomless, like a soft, vast sponge held together only by the shreds of moss and lichen. A traveler's foot settled uncertainly on the niggerhead. The next foot sank deep in the soggy ground. Thus the traveler fought slowly across the miles of tundra—fought until his legs ached and his feet were afire with pain and weariness.

Yet the streams which brought thirty thousand feverish goldrushers to Nome ran through this tundra—Anvil, Peluk, Little, Center, and a score of other creeks, named or un-named. The town outgrew the four hundred feet of beach lying between the tundra and the sea—pushed back onto the tundra itself, a tent-city existing in the center of a bog, vehicular traffic almost impossible, pedestrians dependent upon boards thrown down carelessly as sidewalks. There were no gutters, no paving, no efforts to surface the streets. You stepped from the haphazard boardwalk into the tundra.

We watched the building of Nome and the wild scramblings of thirty thousand gold-mad creatures fighting for space in which to pitch their tents and wrench a living from the ground. Never before in history did so many people gather together in so unlivable a spot.

Front Street was the main thoroughfare, and at least every other building or tent housed a saloon and dance hall. Miners stumbled in from the diggings, fever-eyed

and swollen with the thirty or forty thousand dollars' accumulation of months of work. They sat at a card table or they bucked the wheel or they met French Flo or Diamond Tooth Dorothy. Whiskey sold for a dollar a drink—a mixture of water and grain alcohol and coloring. A quarter was the smallest piece of money used. There were no pennies, nickels or dimes. In a day or a week, the lonesome, pleasure-seeking miner awoke broke and went back to his claim with never a regret. The gamblers and the saloon-keepers and the ladies of the night sent the miners' nuggets and dust to the outside or themselves lost it in the same manner. Fights broke out sporadically. Guns boomed, and corpses lay unclaimed in the streets until morning, when the dead wagon loaded up unceremoniously and dumped its contents on boot hill. Law did not exist in Nome.

Thieves infested the town. A favorite method of robbery was to attach a wad of cotton to the end of a long stick, soak the cotton in chloroform, then slit the canvas of a tent and hold the drugged cotton over a sleeper's nose. After the chloroform took hold, they robbed the victim at their leisure. But if the would-be victim woke, the thieves usually knifed him, dug a hole in the sand floor of his tent, and buried him.

One woman who had been in the dress business had sold out nearly all of her stock and was preparing to leave for the outside the following morning. She had drawn her money—about ten thousand dollars—from the bank, and had it in cash in her money belt. This woman was inviting prey for the robbers, but for once their plans went wrong.

That night after she went to bed, she heard the stealthy slitting of her tent and caught the odor of chloroform. Screaming at the top of her voice, she jumped from bed and ran in her nightgown to the beach, where she hired

someone to row her to her ship, which lay at anchor in the roadstead. In the morning she refused even to come ashore for her luggage or the few dresses which remained unsold in her stock. For many months afterwards, those dresses flapped in the wind. No one bothered to take them.

A few small buildings had been erected the previous year, but nearly everything was in the process of construction when we arrived. The sound of hammers kept up a twenty-four-hour din. Shiploads of lumber and building supplies poured in. At one time, I counted seventy steamers in the roadstead. Buildings sprang up almost overnight. Some were made of wood, but the ships couldn't deliver lumber fast enough to keep up with the demand, and the greater percentage of buildings were merely framed tents. Galvanized iron took second choice.

Sanitary conditions were wretched. Saloons, which made up the bulk of business in Nome, were without facilities at all. A walk down the streets was a long siege of embarrassment. But a decent woman who had business in the town could not avoid passing the bars. They were every place. A little later, a man I had known in Helena set up a hardware business in a large tent, invented a sanitary toilet, and relieved the situation somewhat. His little invention, incidentally, earned him a fortune.

Nome stretched along the beach for about three miles, and was divided in the center by the Snake river. Within these three miles, the tent city had sprung up. Every available inch of beach became a crisscross of overlapping tent-ropes and guy-wires, which formed an almost impenetrable barrier. My trail to and from the office lay along this beach, and it was easy and pleasant to follow if the tide was low and the beach packed hard. But at high tide, I was nearly barred from reaching my tent. The water came within inches of the stakes.

I saw many a newcomer, who was unfamiliar with the rise and fall of the tide, trudge down the beach at low tide, tents and luggage on his back, unable to comprehend this long strip of beach being unoccupied. I stopped them when I saw them, but others erected their tents below the high water mark, set up their stoves and cots and unpacked their other belongings. If they happened to be present when the tide rose, they usually managed to save most of their belongings. But if they were in town or out prospecting, everything they owned was washed out to sea.

Some of the new arrivals would rush from the lighters to the beach, take up handfuls of the sand and run it through their fingers. Bitter disappointment showed on their faces when they found no gold. A man who came to Nome with us on the *Tacoma* had paid someone in New York fifty thousand dollars for the beach at Nome. When Ed told the man that no one could buy the beach—that it was government land—he stayed on the vessel and sailed back to Seattle without disembarking. . . . Later, in the summer, while the boys were on the trail relaying the supplies to Roweburg, one of them found a gull with a broken wing and sent it back to me. I doctored it and nursed it and fed it for awhile, but finally it died. The boys arranged a mock funeral and gave it a burial in the sand just beyond my tent. The grave was complete with floral offerings and a cross. A short time later some newcomers landed and saw the grave. One woman crossed herself in horror and said, “Just look at that! Some poor woman’s lost her baby, and it’s buried right here in the sand!”

Few of the tens of thousands who came to Nome during the rush realized that gold could be found only by working a claim—by the primitive rocker methods or Long Tom or the even slower process of gold pan. In advanced

cases, where a steady flow of water was possible, the method of sluice boxes was used. And I had to learn with most of the rest. I too had been disappointed at finding no gold glittering in the sands of the Bering Sea.

Many of the uninitiated thought of a gold pan as just another pan and used it for cooking, panning and any other chores into which it would fit itself. But they soon learned that a gold pan was something almost sacred in Alaska, and could be used for only the one purpose. It was kept apart from everything else—cherished like some invaluable object. For a gold pan could easily be ruined. If one spot of grease or oil ever got into a pan, it was ruined. The gold then would not sink to the bottom, but would pass over the edge with the tailings. Later that winter, when I was on the trail with four of the boys and an old sourdough, we had only a coffee pot and a frying pan in which to cook all the meals. And with the weather ranging between twenty and sixty below zero, the task of melting snow and thawing the food was endless. Another pan would have eased our burden considerably. Yet the gold pans, which lay strapped in the sleds, were never touched.

The Nome of 1900 was a wild, tightly-packed hive of desperate activity. Men scurrying madly about in their fight for a few feet of space in which to pitch their tents. Mobs wallowing in the tundra streets, the board sidewalks too crowded to accommodate a tenth of the people. Men sitting forlornly on their bags or boxes or crates, too tired to look farther for living space. Men dragging lumber through the bottomless streets of the tundra section. Men pitching tents on minute open sections of beach, while other men angrily sought to evict them at gun-point. Pianos banging in jerry-built saloons and dance halls. Women shrilling—the French Flos and Diamond Tooth Dorothys—behind swinging doors. Gaunt dogs

prowling the lengths of Front Street, then screaming in agony as wheels passed over them. Teams slogging through the mud. Men's voices yelling in drunken joy or blind rage. Pistol shots bringing a momentary hush to the wild song of the frontier. Men fighting and dying in the hot sun of the twenty-four hours of Arctic daylight.

Usually I worked very late at night and would leave the office when the sun was a pale, wan ball of flame far down the horizon. Hardly a night passed that I didn't step across the body of a man on the board sidewalk. Sometimes the man was merely drunk. Occasionally he was dead. I had my choice either of stepping over him or not going home at all. For if I stepped from the boards in an effort to go around him, I would sink to my knees in the tundra.

But the men of Nome, rough and wild and uncouth, caused little trouble outside their own circle. I was never accosted by one of them. My trouble with the doctor was my first and last experience of that sort in Alaska. The gamblers and the thieves and the saloon-keepers and the procurers seemed to have a strict code of their own. The miners—many of them college men—found their female companionship with those women who screamed and shouted and laughed and drank and sang behind the swinging doors. Many of the decent women of Nome condemned those ladies of the night. Others—in the minority—felt that the presence of the *femmes de joie* saved them from molestation.

The post office stood in the tundra section of Nome. For days after a mail came in, the line leading to the post office stretched away for blocks. Letters from my mother reached me in three weeks. Then I waited another week before I could reach the window to ask for them. Once I stood for six hours in mud to my ankles. Men waited about, willing to take anyone's place for a dollar an hour.

I hired a man to hold my place while I went to my tent and cooked something to eat. When I returned and again took my place, I waited until two o'clock the next morning before I got my mail.

There were about six thousand dogs in town—Eskimo dogs, for the most part, which were unaccustomed to the teams moving up and down the streets. The dogs would lie in the center of the road, sunning themselves. They were used to having people or other dog teams go around them; consequently, when a horse-drawn team neared, the dogs would not move and were run over. Morning, noon, and night, when whistles heralded the hour, the dogs pointed their noses to the sky and added a din of howls to the already nerve-tearing voice of the sprawling settlement. But the dogs hauled water and freight and were of great value. Even a mongrel mutt was valued at a hundred or a hundred and fifty dollars. The penalty for killing one deliberately was heavy.

Conditions in Nome were especially disheartening to anyone arriving without money and experience and equipment. Many of the newcomers became so disconsolate they immediately sold whatever they possessed, or, having nothing, wrote home for transportation back to the States before the freeze-up. After such letters as these went out, the line before the post office was very long.

Wood in any form was at a premium. Every foot, every scrap, was treasured. Small boxes were priceless, for there were neither tables nor chairs in most of the tents, and boxes substituted when they could be obtained. I combed the beach, looking for any sort of wood at all—anything that could be made into a seat or table.

Paradoxically, amid all this water and quagmire, dust rose in choking clouds from the trails outside the tundra district and settled over everything. But this was Nome,

the land of golden promise. Wealth lay just ahead for everyone; the gold fever burned bright in all our eyes, and nothing was unendurable if we thought of the goal ahead.

Tents of the other members of the Rowe Mining Company stood in a group around mine. Rowe had intended immediately beginning the relaying of supplies to the Fox river where our camp was to be located. But the boys lay about doing nothing at all while weeks slipped past and Rowe accomplished nothing.

He had many excuses. The freight had not all been included on the *Tacoma*; it would come up on later ships. His backers in New York had not lived up to their word to send supplies which had been promised. A lot of the freight from the *Tacoma* had been lost and would have to be replaced. Hundreds of pounds of provisions were missing. Etc. He could go on indefinitely. And while he talked and delayed and procrastinated, the summer months slipped slowly away. And all during this time, I was the only member of the company who was earning a cent.

At last, Rowe took all but a few of the boys and attended to the preliminary work of establishing the relay camps along the trail to the Fox river. He had already named the campsite Roweburg.

Shipment from Nome by water was the logical means of moving the freight during the summertime. So Rowe used four hundred and seventy-five dollars of the company funds and bought two small boats. One the boys christened the *Flyer*, the other, the *Fizzy*. In my daily letter to my mother—letters which reached her in packets of from ten to sixty, depending upon the time of year—I was very proud of the honor. A boat had been named for her daughter!

The freight was to go on these boats, under sail power, as far as Golofnin Bay. Then they would be hauled by team up the Fox river to its confluence with the Fish, where the permanent camp was being established.

Rowe and his wife went ahead with the boys. Some of them were dropped off at each of the relay stations, one of which was at Port Safety, another at Topkok, a third at Golofnin. Rowe would oversee the work either from the main camp at Roweburg or from Nome. He planned to be on the move all the time. Uncle Howard and Old Man Dow were building cabins which would accommodate the entire company after the relay work had been completed. Several of the boys were delegated to help them. Mrs. Rowe, tiny but capable, would cook for the main camp.

By July ninth, everyone from our company had left Nome but Monty, Ed, Barry and Cecil, who had charge of the relays as far as Port Safety, a distance of about twenty-one miles. Their task kept them on the go almost constantly; consequently I seldom saw them, as I too was busy night and day in the lawyers' office.

I had been miserable in the tent which Rowe had allotted to me. It was old and worn and very, very small—so small that, owing partially to the large amount of supplies which were stored in it, I had difficulty even in turning around. Yet, prior to the boys' leaving for the trail, most of them were there when I came home at meal-times. And it was up to Fizzy to cook for them.

On the evening of June thirtieth, my birthday, I had hurried home to my miserable tent, intent upon getting supper for the boys, a task which I was not bound to do, but which I undertook nevertheless. When I reached the site where my tent should have been, it was gone. A large new tent stood in its place, and I feared some newcomer had arbitrarily usurped my space.

Just then, the boys burst from the new tent crying birthday greetings. They had pooled their money and bought me the new tent. Then, not satisfied with having given me this wonderful gift, they roped off a hundred feet of the ground on which their tents had stood and thus kept me from becoming too crowded by my neighbors.

The tent was a spacious 10x12, and though it had neither a door nor a floor, it was supported by a wooden frame and would withstand a strong blow. A bunk stood in one corner and a sheet-iron Yukon stove in another. This little stove was only about two feet deep, a foot high and a foot wide, but I knew from its reputation that it would cook almost anything. It had no legs but was raised to convenient height on some empty coal-oil cans. In addition there were some boxes, which the boys had probably stolen, and a table.

I tried to thank them, but they would hear nothing of it.

"Shucks, Fizzy," said Monty Marks, "you've been cooking for us and feeding us your supplies ever since we landed."

All my possessions had been moved carefully into the tent. In addition, my trunk had come from New York, and this was a sort of second birthday gift. But when I opened it, I was somewhat dismayed. Mother and a friend of hers had packed it. And now I momentarily regretted having glossed over the true conditions in Nome. The trunk was filled with silk stockings, high heeled slippers, Chinese silk kimonos, two imported gowns, other accessories beyond number—even a pair of my brother's old pajamas had somehow got into it. Silks and high heeled slippers and imported gowns when I needed blankets and warm, heavy clothing!

By now my new corduroy suit, a red sweater and the

leather jacket and leggings were about all I could wear. My shoes, also comparatively new, looked as though one of Sherman's men had worn them on the march to the sea. The skirt was coated with everything from pitch to sourdough. I simply couldn't keep clean in the surroundings. Water sold for five cents a bucket. Anyone doing laundry work charged a minimum of twenty-five cents an article. I had decided against paying such exorbitant prices; I would wash my own clothes.

But when I got through with my hankies, stockings, towels and clothing, they were dirtier than when I started.

Then the relay work began. It was slow work. Most of the time the wind was unfavorable for the sailboats. High seas swamped them continually, and some of the equipment went overboard.

One of the most serious losses was Ed Ferguson's medical supplies and instruments. With them went his Krag Jorgenson rifle. This left the company with only Rowe's old gun, for which there was almost no ammunition, and none procurable in the country. On the other hand, Ed had a large supply of cartridges for his lost gun, but the bullets would fit nothing else. The loss of most of Ed's drugs and instruments and medical supplies was serious but not dangerous. Cecil Marks, the dental student, had two trunks containing about five hundred dollars' worth of various drugs and medical equipment. Cecil had had about three years of medical training, and could duplicate most of the medical supplies Ed lost.

As soon as I had reached Nome, I mailed letters to my mother and my brother telling of our safe arrival. In July, my brother's reply reached me. The *Tacoma* had been reported aground on a mud flat and ground to pieces with all lives lost. He had managed to keep this report

from my mother until my letter arrived. But the *Santa Ana*, upon which I had first booked passage, suffered a disastrous trip. She left Seattle a day ahead of us, but broke down after a short time out and had to return to port for repairs. She sailed again, but caught fire and burned four days, destroying all the baggage. The day before reaching Nome, she hoisted the scarlet fever signal and was quarantined fourteen days. Then the disease was discovered to have been measles! Our experience on the mud flat was tame by contrast.

A bargeload of livestock dropped anchor in the roadstead and began unloading by the simple expedient of dumping the animals into the sea and letting them swim ashore. I gathered with others along the tent-strewn beach and watched the frantic cattle for about an hour.

As I turned away to go to my tent, a loud snorting arose behind me. I turned to see a huge bull, back humped and horns lowered, bearing down on me. Too late, I remembered that I was wearing the red sweater.

There were no fences, no trees, no frame houses or buildings in which to hide. Nothing but flimsy tents—acres of them. I raced down the beach as the bull gained on me.

I imagined that I could feel his hot breath on my neck, when the maze of tent-ropes and guy-wires came to my rescue. At school, I had been a good rope-jumper and often did the traditional hundred jumps. But my school-days' jumping was nothing by comparison to the way I jumped tent-ropes and guy-wires that day at Nome.

The bull plunged into the maze after me, but instead of jumping the ropes, he plowed straight ahead, dragging the tents after him. Soon his new predicament occupied all his anger, and as he became hopelessly entangled, he forgot about me.

A mighty howling and cursing arose as the occupants

of the tents objected to having their shelters torn from over their heads. I did not pause to offer sympathies.

I had four close neighbors—Joe Spinozza, George Spaulding, Old Man Good, and Tom Mulligan. Joe's shack was the crudest of any I saw in Nome. He had made it of flattened five-gallon coal-oil cans, and it couldn't have been more than four feet wide, eight feet long, and six feet high. Each day, the tin became rustier and more corroded from the rain and the spray of the sea. I never went inside it, though it stood almost against one of the rope lines the boys had erected when they gave me the new tent.

Peluk creek ran nearby, and Joe's shack stood at its mouth. Here he had made a crude rocker, using a tub of water and a tin can fastened to the end of a stick for water power. He worked at his placer mine twenty hours out of each day.

After a few weeks, we began greeting each other when I'd pass him on my way to and from the office.

It was usually, "How's it coming, Joe?"

"Oh, not so good—just good indicacious."

I can't remember ever waking at night and not hearing him shoveling sand into the little rocker. He had gold fever bad, and I felt sorry for him. There was no sense in his overdoing things. I felt that the sand held no gold, and no amount of hard work would bring wealth to him.

Occasionally my pity for him would get the better of me, and I'd give him a piece of something tasty I had cooked. But he seldom spoke beyond the "thank you" and "good indicacious" phases.

During one of the fall rainstorms, his little shack became undermined and caved in. I thought he was crazy when he rebuilt it and continued to work twenty hours daily on the strip of beach he had appropriated.

At last, he had worked the sand right up to my rope line. He said nothing, but the next morning he was gone. I never saw him or heard of him again—probably would never even have remembered him if later developments hadn't ironically brought him to mind.

About two years after this, when I was living in Council City, an enormous strike was made on Peluk creek, in the very sand on which my tent had stood, and which Joe had worked so assiduously and quietly. The wily little Italian, fearing robbers, claim jumpers, and murderers, had discovered the richness of the sand, but confided in no one. He must have cleaned up a fortune with his pitiful rocker, then left silently for the States. Those long hours of work had not been spent blindly or in idle hope.

So while Rowe and the rest of the company were fighting their way inland to work claims which might or might not yield gold, I was living, eating, walking and sleeping over tens of thousands of dollars' worth!

My tent stood about four hundred feet back from the high water mark, not far from the beginning of the tundra. My next two neighbors, Old Man Good and Tom Mulligan, bunked together in a tent about fifty feet from me. George Spaulding, my fourth close neighbor, had a tent equally near-by.

Spaulding, a kind, well-educated man, had mined all over the western states and in the Klondike; and now he was trying Alaska. He had brought two horses into the country with him, and on those rare occasions when I had an hour or two of my own, he permitted me to ride one of the animals. I had always admired good horses and loved to ride them, so I became quickly attached to a big splendid gelding named Dick. I even managed to pick up a saddle cheap, to use when I borrowed him. Incidentally, Spaulding gave me the horse when he left for the outside that fall and had no one with whom to leave it. He also

gave me a feather bed worth three hundred and fifty dollars which he had brought in from the Klondike.

Tom Mulligan was a young Irishman with the devil in his snapping black eyes. He had worked for Old Man Good in the latter's brass foundry in Seattle, then had accompanied his employer to Nome, not as an employe, but as his partner. Tom was handsome, carefree and filled with Irish wit. Nothing ever bothered him particularly. He had only one shirt, and washed it every day. Whiskey was his first love, and he never betrayed it. Where the average drinker would take ten drinks and wallow in the tundra, Tom would take ten pints and conduct himself like a gentleman. There was nothing of the disgusting drunk about Tom.

He could cook almost anything, and many times when I passed his tent after fourteen or fifteen hours' work at the office, he would call, "We had a lot of stuff left over from dinner, so I put it in your tent. It'll make a good meal for Faust."

That was Tom's way. When I'd get to the tent, I'd find the stove filled with wood and ready to be lighted, and, on a clean plate carefully covered, as good a meal as Nome could provide. He hated thank you's, and tried to do things for people without obligating them.

He took trips out to Seattle any time the claim he and Good were working cleaned up enough to pay the expenses. That meant a good, prolonged drunk, a penniless awakening, and a return somehow to Nome for more weeks or months of hard labor. It was all the same to Tom. He never evaded hard work, never regretted anything he did.

On one of his Seattle trips, he called everyone to the bar, threw his poke onto the gold scales, and announced to the bartender, "I don't suppose this stuff's any good here."

"I don't know why not," said that worthy.

Tom set them up for the house, not once, but time after time. Hours passed. Naturally, Tom by this time had quite a following.

They began going from bar to bar. Each stop was a repetition of the first.

By morning, when the poke was almost empty, the police suddenly swooped down on Tom and his friends and threw them all in jail. The saloon-keepers had sworn out a warrant against Tom for passing brass filings as gold dust.

The sly Irishman was ready for them and had his witnesses right there safely locked in jail with him. When the case was called, Tom and his followers proved that the Irishman hadn't passed the brass filings as gold—had, in fact, simply stated in each bar that he didn't suppose the stuff was good. The case collapsed around the enraged saloon-keepers.

Tom quickly acquired a vast knowledge concerning everything pertaining to placer mining. Gradually he earned a name as an authority on the subject. In 1903, a New York man was scouting the territory, looking for suitable claims to exploit. He ran across Tom, who had some good claims, and contracted him to come to New York and help exploit the sale of stock in Tom's property. This was like offering a boat to a drowning man.

In New York, the promoters installed Tom in one of the best hotels, outfitted him meticulously at one of the better tailors, allowed him a large expense account, and used him as bait for prospective buyers of mining stock. But Tom conquered the big city at once, and started traveling at a pace too rapid even for the high-flying promoters. In a short time, he had spent everything they allowed him, had run up an enormous bill at the hotel, and had got into a number of embarrassing situations which

required great finesse to quiet and straighten out without backfiring into the laps of the promoters.

As a result, the promoters, who were not yet through with Tom, placed him on a modest allowance and installed him in a small family hotel in a little town upstate near the Canadian line. Here he was under orders to live quietly and remain out of sight until they needed him further. But Tom was not the man to remain quietly or out of sight.

He made the rounds of the little town quickly, and soon was on excellent terms with everyone of any importance. Wives looked at him yearningly, and husbands who should have known better trusted him to the limit. Tom started entertaining the town, and found his new allowance far from sufficient. The promoters refused to increase it, so Tom sold stock in his claim to everyone who could stand the outlay.

This went on for several weeks, and at last the promoters learned of it. But they were too late. By this time Tom had spent all the money he had derived from the sale of the stock, had nearly wrecked several homes, had run up a trail of bills, had caused numerous heartaches, and had torn the little community apart with scandal.

The promoters accepted defeat, bought him a ticket to Nome and got him out of New York state as quickly as possible. Tom came back on the first ship to arrive after the break-up, and borrowed five dollars from someone, to hire a dory to take him ashore. But landing broke meant nothing at all to Tom. He had spent fifteen or twenty thousand dollars on this trip, and never gave it another thought. He had had a good time. That was why people lived—to enjoy life. He'd work hard and make some more money and go outside and do it all over again.

Old Man Good lived most of the time in mortal terror. Whenever Tom was off prospecting or working the claim,

and Good was left alone in the tent, I could expect daily reports of attempted robberies. And they never failed to come. Every morning, Good would tell me that murderers or robbers had tried to get him the night before. Ashen of face and actually trembling, the old man was pitiful. I listened in sympathy and sought to alleviate his fears.

He suggested time after time that I permit him to move their tent inside my ropes, so he too could have the added protection of Faust. So great was his terror that he even suggested I give him my revolver, which would have left me with no protection at all, aside from the dog! The revolver, by the way, was the smallest weapon on display at the Sportsman's Show that year in New York, and had been given to me by a nephew of Captain Frederick Marryat, the novelist who wrote *Mr. Midshipman Easy*.

Though Good never spoke of his financial condition, I knew from Tom that the old man kept a large amount of dust and nuggets in his tent, and lived in constant fear that robbers would hear of it and chloroform or kill him. He imagined nightly that the robbers were just outside his tent, and made such a nuisance of himself in his cowardice that my sympathy for him at last turned to disgust. I told Monty that the old man's imagination was driving me crazy.

"We'll fix him," said Monty.

The next morning at two o'clock, we took my little pearl-handled revolver and fired it into the ground, just outside Good's tent, then scampered from sight. Perhaps it was a mean trick to play on Good, but he had driven me until I wanted to give him cause for alarm.

I didn't have long to wait. Early the next morning, he was waiting for me.

"Well, sir," he began, short of breath and gray of face, "they nearly got me last night. Three of them, but I fought 'em off. They fired once, and missed me."

I decided to add a finishing touch.

"Too bad about Tom."

"Yes," he muttered, "he should have been here to help me."

I feigned a look of surprise. "I didn't mean that. . . . Why, don't you know the real reason Tom's away so much?"

"He's supposed to be at the claim, but he's a wild one."

"Tom's the leader of the gang that's going through the tents and robbing everybody. That's why I never keep any dust here."

His eyes widened credulously, and he gulped behind his dingy whiskers. "Tom's a robber?"

"Of course. I thought you knew. That's where he gets all the extra money for liquor and those expensive trips to Seattle."

He paled further, remained silent a moment, then gulped again. "Where d'you keep your dust?"

"In the bank. Nothing's safe from that gang. They killed another man last night and stole his gold."

Old Man Good rushed into his tent, then trudged the mile and a half to the bank and deposited his gold.

By way of passing, I might mention that the banking methods of pioneer Alaska would give a modern banker nightmares. Several years later, when my claims on Ophir creek were producing and I had a large payroll and huge expenses, I would telephone from Council City to the bank in Nome and tell them I had just made a clean-up and had fifteen thousand dollars' worth of dust there. They would credit my account with that amount, and I'd check against it. Perhaps two or three or four weeks would pass before the trails would clear sufficiently for me to send the gold to the bank in Nome.

When Tom returned to the tent after I'd told the tale

of his being a robber, Old Man Good took him sternly to task.

"I say, Tom, I've been like a father to you. I've done for you and watched over you and helped you get started here in Alaska. I've shared this tent with you and given you half of everything we've taken from the claim. And now you've turned out like this—robbing and killing and disgracing yourself. I say—"

I stood outside the tent and listened to this—heard him pause between sentences and spit, then begin nearly every new thought with an "I say"—a grammatical habit which eventually led to my naming a claim the "I Say."

Tom cried, as though he had not heard right, "Robbing and killing and— What in God's name are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about. Miss Fitz told me the whole story. It's the evils of those companions you pick up with in the bars—those thieves and killers and—"

Gradually Tom drew from Good my story, then, wanting to kid the old man along, confessed to the many murders and robberies, but promised to drop his evil companions and lead an exemplary life if Good wouldn't expose him.

I burst out laughing outside the tent. We had had our fun and didn't wish to plague the old man longer. But when we wished to ease his mind, he wouldn't believe us. The story fitted Tom too perfectly!

Chapter Four

THE Eskimos around Nome were hard-working, trustworthy and kind. In many ways they resembled the Japanese, with tiny hands and feet and Asiatic features. The faces of the women had been tattooed lightly when they were children. This was done with porcupine quills and ashes.

Before the advent of the white man, they hunted down everything they ate and wore. The women did most of the work on the skins, even chewing them until they were soft, before stripping. They sewed with a rude thimble on the first finger, and pulled the needle toward them. Thread was made in ten or twelve inch lengths from the sinews of the deer. These threads of sinews were especially adaptable to muckluks, for when the thread got wet it swelled and rendered the muckluks waterproof. Winter muckluks were made of deer or seal skin, summer muckluks of salmon skin.

When Cecil Marks later broke from the Rowe Company, most of his patients were Eskimos. He learned that they were very fond of any sort of medicine, and when they

saw him approaching, they would start coughing violently, in hope of being given a larger dose. Doctor Marks now laughs at the theory that a lack of milk, or vegetables like spinach, or proper gum exercise from tough, hard foods, causes decay of the teeth. He examined the teeth of thousands of Eskimos and never once found a cavity! And the Eskimos lived almost entirely upon soft food; they had never even seen milk until the white man came.

The Eskimos feared the coming of death. When Cecil first reached Alaska, he attended an Eskimo lying gravely ill. The family asked, "Him die pretty soon?" Cecil, feeling that the case was hopeless, nodded. "Yes, maybe him die." Cecil's hope had been that in the imminency of death, the family would nurse the dying man more carefully. But, to his horror, the family moved en masse from the igloo, abandoning the man lest they be present when death made its visit. Cecil changed his tactics thereafter.

If a baby was coming into the world, its clothes were kept out of the igloo until after the birth. If the baby didn't arrive quickly enough to suit the father, he would knead the expectant mother's stomach with his knee, often causing death. But a birth on the trail caused little commotion, excitement or delay. Cecil told me that many times when Eskimos were mushing with his party, a stop would be made while a woman gave birth to a child. Within an hour, she was bucking the trail again.

Cecil frequently encountered groups of aged Eskimos hiding from their fellow tribesmen. The old men had become a liability—ate up the efforts of the others and were useless for hunting or fishing. They risked being killed by returning to the villages.

The Eskimos were very fond of white man's food when they could get it, but lived mostly on the fruits of their own labor: sun-dried salmon, frozen tomcod, seal, deer and

plenty of seal oil. In season, they had huckleberries and salmon berries.

A mother would place her baby on her back and run ahead of the dog team all day, to keep the dogs on the trail. They believed that the northern lights were little Eskimos.

Later, when I lived in Council City, they would appear at my cabin without warning or invitation and squat on the floor and watch me closely while I cooked. Their sense of smell was phenomenal, for I never fried a batch of doughnuts without a throng of hungry Eskimos smelling them from a mile or so and calling upon me.

There were many graves of the Eskimos along the beach trail. Once Rowe sent for me to come to Irene creek, a tributary of the Nome river, and help with the assessment work on some claims he had staked there. I passed these graves and learned with surprise that the dead are not buried in the ground, but are wrapped in their blankets and placed on a crude burial platform about five or six feet off the ground. The bodies then are protected with a framework of sticks.

Everything belonging to the dead had been placed beside them. I even saw the skeletons of dogs which had been tied to the poles supporting the platforms. Sometimes the last dishes from which they had eaten lay beside the bodies, with the remnants of the meal still on them.

The white men succumbed to temptation and robbed these graves of ivories and other little treasures. Sometimes they tore down the graves for firewood. On one grave, someone had posted a sign: "Please do not use this grave for firewood."

The Eskimos could sense a change in weather. Late in the summer they warned the gold-rushers that some of

the tents were pitched too close to the high water mark—that a storm was coming and the tents might be swamped. No one paid them any heed.

In the middle of August, after Rowe and the boys had left to establish camps, and Monty, Ed, Barry and Cecil were relaying supplies to Port Safety, the storm struck. Wind and waves drove across the flat beach, swamping the smaller boats, and washing away many of the tents. On August twentieth, five bodies washed ashore in a tangle of wrecked boats and houses. Tom Mulligan, Old Man Good, Joe Spinozza, George Spaulding and I stayed on, feeling secure in the four hundred feet of beach which lay between our tents and the water.

Early in September, the Big Storm struck. The wind swung to the south, and soon was blowing a gale. High breakers boiled across the beach and smashed deafeningly. Rain lashed down in rivers. A small lake lying at the foot of the tundra filled rapidly and threatened to overflow.

Tom Mulligan, his wild young Irish face this once showing concern, stuck his head in my tent.

“If the lake lets go, we’ll be right in its path.”

“Is it that close?”

“Might happen any minute.”

“Let’s try to get up to the town.”

He shook his head. “Too late for that. There’s no trail.”

I looked out the flap. Tom strode away and disappeared into his tent. Gold-rushers scurried about, arms filled with belongings, in a last-minute effort at salvage. But it was useless, for there was no escape now. On one side stood the tundra and the threatening lake, on the other the sea. And on the narrow strip of beach between stood those thousands upon thousands of tents with their impassable maze of ropes and wires.

Tom and Spaulding started raising a small levee of sand, which they hoped would veer the water around our tent-sites if the lake overflowed. The surf boomed louder; the wind blew harder; the rain slanted down without let up.

Tom yelled, "Here she comes!" His voice was a whisper in the roar of the storm.

The lake had overflowed. Now a trickle of water dissolved the sandy shore, became mightier, ate away huge sections of soil, descended upon us in a flood.

Everyone paused in whatever he was doing, and, for a moment, poised statuesque as the dirty water boiled upon us. Then the men started to flee, but the water from the lake met the water of the sea in a churning mass of tents and debris and humanity.

Tom and Spaulding raced to the slight bulwark they had raised from Peluk creek to a point beyond the land we occupied. The water hit the little levee, then split and raced around us.

Tom said, "I wonder what's become of Old Man Good and Joe."

The rain poured down, and the bitter wind lashed at my tent. The surf banged nearer and nearer. I looked out upon the scene of water and desolation. Mine was the only tent left standing in the vicinity.

All around us, men splashed and floundered and fought against the undertow. Some managed to wade across the inundated stretch of beach which had been closed by the tents, and thus made their way to the business section of Nome. But others could not fight the undertow and were swept out into the Bering Sea. I would hear a yell, suddenly choked by water, see a hand flailing wildly in the foam, and that was all. There was no way of saving them.

Time passed slowly and Tom and Spaulding and I constantly reinforced the little levee above my tent. Now all

about us was deserted. I too wondered what had become of Old Man Good and Joe.

At last I could stand the cold and wet no longer and crawled into my bunk. Faust whined, then jumped up beside me. I hugged him close, grateful for his damp, doggy warmth. . . . Tom and Spaulding worked on at the levee outside.

I lay back listening to the roar of the wind and rain against the canvas, and wondered how many hours would pass before my tent too would go down. The hours passed in cold discomfort and fitful rest.

Faust suddenly growled and stiffened. I could hear nothing above the storm, but some inner sense told me that something or someone had come into the tent. I reached for the little pistol which Captain Marryat's nephew had given me.

"Who's there?"

No answer—only the wild song of the wind and the thunder of the sea.

"Stop or I'll shoot!"

Faust began barking furiously. A low, vicious snarl answered him from the floor. Quickly I struck a light. A fear-driven Alaska husky crouched on the sand floor, its head hanging low as terror-filled eyes looked up obliquely.

I jumped from bed and tried, in my limited Alaska husky language, to reassure the dog. Faust raved in jealousy, and I silenced him.

The husky relaxed on the sand, and I returned to my bunk. Faust settled down. I thought of the wild animals which fear sometimes drove into settlers' cabins during forest fires. I wondered how the dog had got here—why he wasn't with his master. And then I remembered those men who had lost their fight with the undertow.

The night finally passed, and I crawled from bed. The husky was gone—had slipped away during the night. The

fury of the storm continued unabated. I joined Tom and Spaulding in replacing the sand which washed away from our little levee. The men looked worn and tired. I prevailed upon them to catch a moment's rest in my tent.

The day passed, and then the night, and then another day. And the water continued its assault against the puny barrier which guarded my tent from the lake and the sea.

At last we could do no more. Human endurance gave out.

Spaulding shook his head. "There's no use trying. It's got me licked."

He sagged down onto a box in my tent. Tom flopped on the bunk. I started piling my belongings, in hope the water might swirl around them and not wash them away.

Suddenly, Tom sat up. "Say! The rain's stopping!"

It was true. The pounding against the tent had died to a light rolling, like drums in the distance. Tom and Spaulding hurried outside. I went to the flap. The water began to recede.

I set my belongings back on the sand, then crawled into my bunk. Tom and Spaulding returned and rolled themselves in blankets they had salvaged and passed into exhausted slumber on the floor.

At daybreak, I broke some of my precious boxes and lighted a fire. Almost as soon as the smoke started going out the stovepipe, Old Man Good entered the tent, wet and blue with cold.

"I been marooned up in the tundra all night."

We rejoiced at seeing him—learned that Joe Spinozza too had managed to escape. Good clung to the stove; smelly fingers of steam vaped from his garments. Spaulding and Tom, their eyes thick with sleep and exhaustion, stumbled outside to wash in a bucket.

"Hey!" Tom cried. "Salvage! Come on!"

Good and I raced to join them. The beach was now cov-

ered with a sort of treasure other than gold—canned food and lumber and boxes and coal and clothing. Treasure to warm the flesh and chase chill from the damp Arctic air.

Two days passed before we could reach the business section of Nome. Conditions were terrible. Hundreds of homeless men roamed the streets, sleeping in saloons or any other place which would take them out of the cold. Most of them had no money and had lost all their possessions when the water swept their tents to sea. Their only immediate aim was to get back to the States as quickly as possible.

The Snake river, which passed through the center of Nome, creating a point of land called the Spit, had swollen to twenty times its normal width. The Spit lay beneath hundreds of tons of wreckage. Everywhere was a welter of smashed boats and houses and stores and splintered lumber.

Only three ships escaped disaster: the *Tacoma*, which had been lying in the roadstead, but put to sea when the storm broke; and two other steamers that found refuge about twenty miles west in Bering Sea behind Sledge Island. Everything else now lay in wreckage—tugs, lighters, dories, skiffs. Later I learned that the damage amounted to somewhere in the neighborhood of a million dollars—this in a frontier town which didn't even exist two years before.

No accurate list of the dead could ever be made, for too many of them were homeless, their whereabouts unknown. They were never missed. But while we lingered near the waterfront on the Spit we saw searchers threading their way through the wreckage. A cry would go up, and men would hurry to a common gathering spot and kneel over some half-concealed object. We knew without

looking that another battered human form had been found.

As we made our way back to camp, we spoke fearfully of the boys—of Monty and Ed and Barry and Cecil—who had been relaying supplies in the boats when the storm struck. As if in answer to our questions, Monty Marks was waiting for us in the tent when we returned. He had walked the twenty-one miles from Port Safety, simply to assure himself that we had come through the Big Storm all right.

I got him something to eat, and he told us of his experiences. Rowe had placed Dan Wheedon and Monty in charge of the big supply tent at Solomon, the next relay point to Golofnin. The camp at Solomon stood at the foot of a hill, about fifty feet back from the Solomon river.

The water began rising about seven o'clock in the evening, and soon flooded a ditch between the camp and the side of the hill. Monty and Dan saw that if the water rose higher the supplies and the tent would be swept away. They pulled down the tent, managed to set it again far up the hill beyond the ditch, then began moving the picks and shovels and gold pans and bedding and other equipment to the new cache.

Rain poured down in torrents; the wind tore viciously at the tent. Each trip up the hillside and back to the original tent-site meant fording the swollen ditch. They worked all night, but at last had all the supplies under the tent.

By now it was five o'clock in the morning, and the boys were soaked and half frozen. There was no chance of their building a fire, for every sliver of wood was as wet as they. Across the river from them, however, was a road-house known as Thompson's Place, a sturdy stopping point on a high piece of ground. Monty and Dan decided

to take the boat and buck the current to Thompson's.

The swollen river rushed them a mile downstream before they could land, but they walked back to the roadhouse, bought food, and sat before the fire until they were warm. Then they set out for Solomon with fifty cents in their pockets.

By this time, Solomon had been almost entirely washed away. There was nothing for them to do but try to reach Port Safety, a distance of about eleven miles in the direction of Nome. They set out on foot, towing the boat behind them in the waters of the lagoon. At Port Safety they hoped to find Rowe, who had been directing the relaying operations from the camp there.

The flood had erased all landmarks, and when darkness fell the boys were lost. They struggled ahead for several hours in the darkness, but at last Dan, a not overly strong man, gave out. Monty loaded Dan into the boat and set out again along the beach hoping it would lead to Port Safety.

After they had made several miles, a wild form suddenly darted from the darkness and let out a terrifying yell. Dan jumped erect just as a man landed in the boat and took possession. He developed into a character known as Eskimo Mike, a bad man sober and a worse man drunk. And now he was drunk and had a bottle.

For a time they could not budge him. Then he ran out of whiskey and ordered the boys to get him some more.

"Get out of the boat," ordered Monty.

"This my boat." Mike stretched himself out in the boat and refused to move. The rain pelted down.

Dan's weakness eliminated his being of much help in a fight, but little Monty tore into the drunken Eskimo and dumped him out on the ground. Mike immediately grabbed the towline and started running along the beach. Monty tackled him and threw him.

Mike was a big, husky King Islander, not at all like the mild little Eskimos who lived near Nome. Yet Monty, who, since leaving school, had spent most of his time selling pianos in Manhattan, waited for the booze-maddened King Islander to get up. When this occurred, Monty flattened him with one punch.

Mike started to yell for help. In a few moments, a group of armed King Islanders rushed in from the darkness. Monty stood up to them and demanded that they take care of Mike and let the two white men continue on their way. His bluff worked, and the leader of the Eskimos ordered two men to jump on Mike and hold him down while the leader smelled of his breath. Then he gave Monty the boat, told him how to get to Port Safety, and held Mike while the two boys got away.

The leader had told them to follow the banks of the lagoon until they crossed the inlet called Fox lake and came to the spit of land which led to Port Safety. It was a long way around, and far out of their way, but in the high wind and driving rain they dared not risk crossing the open water in the boat.

They floundered about all night and all the next day, lost again. The water continued to rise, and they found themselves trapped. This necessitated their taking to the boat, in which they drifted aimlessly until daylight.

Luckily, the storm now passed, and the wind and water began to drop. They set out across the lagoon for Port Safety, and at last found Cecil and Rowe in the Alaska Commercial Company's building, the only structure left standing in the settlement.

As in Nome, the Eskimos at Port Safety had warned the inhabitants that in "four suns, plenty water." Rowe and most of the others paid no heed. But when the flood reached Port Safety, not an Eskimo remained on the spit.

Cecil had just finished his supper when the storm

struck. He had been standing outside, paying little attention to a small pool of rain water at his feet when suddenly it was over his shoes. He hurried to the lagoon where the other boat had been anchored. It was gone, the banks were overflowed, and water poured in a solid wall toward the tent housing the supplies. By the time he reached the tent, he was wading in four feet of water.

He and Rowe tried to salvage what they could, but soon the lagoon and the sea met, just as the lake had come down to meet the sea at Nome, and everything was lost. In this relay camp had been large supplies of food and nearly all the personal baggage of the company. The most serious loss of all was the two trunks containing Cecil's instruments and drugs. Cecil managed to salvage only a few things he could quickly jam into his pockets. Now neither Cecil nor Ed had medical aid if we fell sick.

The inhabitants of Port Safety gathered in the store and decided that if the water rose higher, they would get into small boats and try to find safety at sea. One of the saloons had about fifty thousand dollars' worth of liquor on hand. The owners realized that their building was doomed and set out tubs filled with whiskey for anyone who cared to take it.

The water rose to a depth of four feet in the store, then finally began its ebb. Everyone came through the storm at Port Safety, but our supplies and medicines were lost. Our money was low, and now the prospects for the future looked very dark for our company.

The Eskimos furnished a comic touch in all that tragedy when they returned to Port Safety after the storm. They had been busy salvaging, and now wore many of the results of their finds. Long skirts hung from beneath their parkas; pink and blue corsets graced the forms of both male and female.

The Big Storm, which served as a warning of even

worse things to come, had its effect. Each outgoing boat became crowded with frightened souls who fled the wild elements that had, in one swoop, snatched everything but their lives from them. And I knew that the time for my departure was drawing close. Soon I would see Rowe, divide my summer's earnings with him, and go outside for the winter. I had worked hard since I came to Nome, and felt that I deserved a rest. There was some public stenographic work still to be done in Nome, but once that dropped off, I would be of little further use to the company. If I stayed in Nome during the winter, I might or might not be successful in securing enough work to carry me through. If I joined the main camp at Roweburg, I would be only a liability in the food I'd eat. I made up my mind to see Rowe when he came to Nome, and make preparations to leave for the winter. So in preparation for seeing him, I drew up a balance sheet of my earnings, and found that during the summer he had drawn nearly all of his half. Most of the money I had was my own.

The balance sheet was a waste of time, and I had a lot to learn—of Bill Rowe and Alaska and contracts that are either read hurriedly or not examined at all. I was not going back to New York that winter or the next or the next. Many a cold wind and icy storm would sweep across Alaska before Fannie Ella again set foot in New York's Grand Central Station.

Darkness daily shut down earlier—at eight o'clock, seven, six. And as the nights became longer, the criminals grew bolder. Robbery and death terrorized the town. Stealthy hands slit the canvas, and the smell of chloroform was in the air. And if the sleeper awoke, it was too bad for him.

By now, the men of our company were in Roweburg, establishing the camp, or doing the assessment work for

1900 on the claims, or moving the last of the supplies from Nome to the Fox river camp. Joe Spinozza had quietly disappeared, and his shack, more rusty and begrimed than ever, stood idle. My only companions, when they weren't away prospecting, were Old Man Good and Tom and Spaulding.

I began to know fear—something I had been too busy to recognize before, too busy and excited. But now the excitement palled and much time hung idle on my hands. I managed to earn a little each day as a public stenographer, but the trips to and from my tent became nightmarish. More than once, as I trod the narrow board sidewalk over the tundra, a man fell through the door of a saloon and collapsed at my feet. With reeling senses, I kept my eyes from the blood, stepped across the body, and hurried blindly to my tent. Nightly the voice of Nome took on a wilder, more abandoned note.

Darkness came at five o'clock, four o'clock. Now I had nearly five thousand dollars in cash—my pay from the law firm before its exposure. Rumors had made their rounds concerning the bank's stability; yet I couldn't risk carrying the money myself or hiding it in my tent. So I attached a large satchel tag to Faust's collar—one which ostensibly merely told his owner's name in case he became lost—and hid the money in thousand dollar bills beneath the identification card. Faust roamed the mining camp, probably brushing past the very legs of the thieves and killers who would slay ten people for the amount Faust carried in his collar.

Rowe continually sent someone to Nome, to get money from me on account: a hundred here, five hundred there. I feared that he would draw his half of my earnings before I had an opportunity to see him. But Rowe was all over the place—Roweburg, Solomon, Port Safety, at

various claims he had staked between the Nome river and Council City. I waited patiently for him.

My canned goods gave out, and since I was leaving Nome shortly I didn't replenish my supply. I had eaten fresh meat only twice since landing in Nome, and now had only beans, cornmeal and potatoes. Prices on all food-stuffs were sky-high, beyond belief. Perhaps I shouldn't have been so conscientious over spending the money I had earned, but I kept it as nearly intact as possible, anxious for its proper division at the end of the season in accordance with my contract. I listed each dollar I earned, each dollar that was expended. When I saw Rowe, I could show him my earnings and my expenditures to the cent.

Now winter lay just ahead, and the freeze-up was imminent. The last ships to Seattle lay in the roadstead, preparing to sail. Spaulding decided to go out for the winter, and gave me the gelding, Dick, and the feather bed, and a gramophone with one cracked record. Nightly I'd play it, and the needle would stick, and the voice would sing, "I'll love you in the same old—same old—same old—" until I jarred it from the crack.

Rowe sent Lyman to me for more money, and I learned they were at Irene creek, a tributary of the Nome river. I could wait no longer for the man. I would go to him, have the accounting, then take one of the steamers lying in the roadstead.

I saddled Dick and rode him to Irene creek. Here Rowe dealt me the first of a series of blows.

"What's this about you going to New York for the winter, Fizzy?"

I smiled. "That's right. I think I've earned a rest."

"You have, and there's nobody who'd be happier to see you go than me, but have you enough money?"

"Money?" I asked in amazement. "Well, I should

think I'd have the fare after all I earned this summer."

"But not much of that will be left for you, Fizzy. Haven't you figured it out?"

"Not much— Certainly I've figured it out. I don't know what you're talking about, Rowe."

Then he told me. I had paid little attention when I signed the eighteen-months' contract with him, but had believed implicitly that each of us retained a half of what we earned and the other half went to the company. Now I learned that the company received one-half of the earnings, and the other half was divided equally between the twenty-three members. I would actually receive only one twenty-third of one-half of my earnings—about a hundred and ten dollars.

No one else had earned any actual cash. The boys had worked hard and staked many claims, in which I had the same interest as they, but these claims wouldn't buy passage to Seattle or train fare to New York. They wouldn't buy food or clothing or coal oil or coal. And Rowe, who was broke, would need not only his half of my earnings—most of which he'd already drawn and spent—to carry the company through the winter, but also the money which, under the contract, I owed to the other members of the company. Money which he had expected from the States had failed to arrive. And the last steamer from Seattle was in.

I took the blow as best I could, thinking all the time of my mother and the predicament she might be in if I failed to send money to help her through the winter.

But a contract was a contract, and I meant to live up to my agreement.

"It's not myself so much," I said after the shock had been somewhat absorbed. "It's my mother—" And I told Rowe of her predicament.

He thought this over for a few moments, then decided

that he would not insist upon my leaving my share of my earnings in the company treasury. Instead, I could send it to her and give her at least this little help. A hundred and ten dollars, when I had planned on giving her at least a thousand!

Rowe had a suggestion to make. "Lyman and Lang are going out on the last boat. They'll represent us in New York during the winter and will raise money and form some auxiliary companies with the new claims we've staked. In the spring, they'll return with supplies and cash, and during the winter they'll send money in to me over the ice by dog team. But while they're in New York they can turn this hundred and ten dollars of yours over to your mother and sort of look after her for the winter."

It wasn't much, but it was better than nothing. I thanked him as best I could.

"I'm sorry it has to be this way, Fizzy. But if I didn't insist upon the money, all of us might starve up here. I don't know how we'd pull through if it weren't for the money Lyman and Lang'll send in over the ice."

Lyman, who had accompanied me back to Irene creek, and who had listened silently to the conversation, assured me that he had money of his own in New York. There was no sense in my taking the money from the general fund when it was needed so badly here. If I'd leave the hundred and ten dollars with Rowe, Lyman and Lang would pay the money to my mother from their own pockets as soon as they reached New York. Then their money would be repaid when they collected some of the funds due Rowe.

I returned to Nome feeling somewhat easier. Winter in the north would be a terrible experience, but Nome was growing, and life would be at least livable. I would work hard—would canvass the town for any typing or book-keeping possible. Perhaps I could even arrange with the

feed store to feed Dick if I kept their books. Things would not be so bad.

Winter tightened its grip, and the last of the fleeing gold-rushers sailed for the States. There was little suffering among the Nome inhabitants, but the dogs and the horses went through tortures. The dogs seemed suddenly to go mad. They bit other dogs and chewed themselves horribly. Their owners were desperate; dogs were valuable—one of the most valuable assets of the north—but their madness failed to pass. The owners shot the animals lest they inoculate other dogs with their disease. I felt that the dogs could have been saved. They never bit human beings. And they chewed themselves up as bad as other dogs. From their symptoms I believed they suffered only from worms.

The horses' plight was even more pitiful than the dogs. After the freeze-up there was no drinking water obtainable except from tank wagons in the streets, which dispensed it for twenty-five cents a gallon. I found that I couldn't support Dick, and sent him to Roweburg, where the boys promised him good care in exchange for the heavy work he took from their shoulders.

But many horse owners simply turned their animals loose, and got on an out-going ship. The horses were left to shift for themselves. And there was nothing for them to eat, no water for them to drink. No one wanted them; the price of feed and water prohibited carrying them through the winter. So the thirsty, hungry creatures stumbled about the icy streets, following the tank wagons in hope of getting a drink.

Right after the freeze-up, horses which had cost between three and four hundred dollars in the spring sold for ten to twenty-five dollars as dog food. Then it was found that the dogs couldn't thrive on horse flesh, and from then on the animals were left to stumble about until they died of

thirst or starvation. At times I felt I'd go mad listening to them at night.

I continued working when I could find it and managed to earn a little money, which Rowe agreed to let me keep. I would need that money during the hard winter to come—need it for coal and blankets and a new tent and food.

The cold bit down, chilled the marrow of living bones. The town took on a bleak, almost forbidding aspect. Anvil Peak brooded in the distance. It was a proper setting for the second blow which Rowe was saving for me.

Chapter Five

BY NOVEMBER, daylight lasted only about six hours. The nights turned bitterly cold, and though I had acquired a big stove and a new winter tent, a constant chill lived in my body.

Rowe had got the stove—an eight-hole restaurant range—in a deal for supplies with one of the thousands who had abandoned their quest for gold after the Big Storm. Old Man Good had bought a new 10x12 tent, but he too left for the States when snow and cold weather set in, and I bought it from him. I also picked up three small tables—one for a dressing table, one for serving meals, and one for my gray enamel washbowl and pitcher; a tiny cupboard, some wooden boxes, two stools, a rug and a steamer chair. Prior to the advent of winter, these articles were impossible to obtain at any price.

Rowe gave me the range, and the boys installed it in a corner of my new home. But the stove was a failure, not only for cooking but also for heating. And the outlook of keeping that firebox filled with coal during the winter was dark. Already it had gobbled up all the coal I had sal-

vaged after the storm, and was now eating three to four dollars' worth a day.

But I had reconciled myself to staying in Nome during the winter, and though there might be only a little work for me before spring, I felt reasonably certain that I could earn not only a living but also something additional to send out over the ice to my mother. Reports had to be typed, winter or no winter. And I intended handling the public stenographic work in Nome during the freeze-up. Then, in the spring, our mines would be producing, and we would all be rich.

Monty and Ed and Barry and Rowe had come to Nome from the relay camps, prepared to haul the final loads of mining equipment to Roweburg. And since the rivers were frozen and the boats couldn't be used, these supplies would have to be moved by hand. We were too poor to buy dogs.

The three boys and I huddled around the stove, waiting for Rowe to return from Nome, where he was making final arrangements for the trip which would start in the morning. For three days, a blizzard had been lashing across the Bering Sea, but now it subsided reluctantly, like an old man who cherishes his anger. There would be nothing to stop Rowe and the boys from pushing off in the morning.

The equipment stood under canvas tarpaulins on two sleds outside my tent. And when the men dragged those two sleds away, I probably would see nothing more of them until spring. The sleds with their equipment were our last link together. No other reason existed for the boys' making the hard hundred-mile trip from Roweburg. This night was a sort of farewell until spring.

Ed muttered, shaking his head slowly, "I don't know how we'll ever get those sleds over the trail without dogs."

Monty said, "We'll make it all right. Rowe knows what he's doing."

"They weigh five hundred pounds apiece," growled Ed, looking down at his thin hands.

The boys were ill-equipped to withstand the hardships of the trail. Monty had lost his heavy muckluks in the flood. There was no money to buy new ones, so he'd have to make the trip in a thin summer pair. Neither Rowe nor the boys had furs. Their only bedding would be an insufficient number of blankets, eked out with the tarpaulins. Another remembrance of the flood.

Rowe pushed into the crowded tent, shook snow from his coat, and stood warming his hands over the stove. A frown creased his face.

Monty asked, "Anything wrong?"

Rowe turned and looked at me. "You'll have to come to Roweburg with us."

"Me!"

He nodded. "I can't leave you here alone. It's too dangerous."

Ed cried, "But you can't take her on that hundred-mile mush! She isn't physically able to—"

"That's just the trouble," interrupted Rowe seriously. "She isn't physically able to stay alone in Nome during the winter. We're not sure she'll find enough work to carry her through, and chances are we can't get back here until spring. What would she do if she ran out of coal and didn't have any money?" He was talking now in his most persuasive manner, using the ministerial tone which compelled belief in the listener. "Nome's no place for a girl without money and without anyone to look out for her. And she hasn't any regular work she can depend on." His eyes swung to me. "You know how it is here, Fizzy: thieves and murderers roaming the town, breaking into tents and robbing and killing somebody almost

every night. Drunks all over the place. There's no telling what might happen now. At the camp, you'll at least be safe and have plenty to eat."

"But I could never make that long trip on foot; and, besides, the camp will be overcrowded as it is. I'd rather stay here and take my chances on picking up enough typing and bookkeeping to carry me through the winter."

"After the freeze-up, Nome is dead as far as business goes. Maybe you'd get work, maybe not. And the camp at Roweburg won't be crowded in the least. You can have one of the small cabins all for yourself."

"I didn't know Dow had finished them," I said, remembering gossip which the relay boys had brought to Nome.

"Well, he's got the big cabin all finished, and the singles 'll be done by the time we get there."

Monty said seriously, "It's a long, tough trip to ask a girl to take. Even though I've never been all the way myself and don't know just what's ahead, I'm a little afraid of it."

Rowe laughed lazily. "Trip? That's no trip. Only a hundred miles over well-traveled trails. We'll spend every night in one of the roadhouses."

"Sure," muttered Ed sarcastically, "no trip at all. Especially without dogs, and hauling two heavy sleds by hand. Think nothing of it."

"Sleds aren't hard to move over snow. It won't take over seven days at the most—probably six." Rowe sat down on a box and leaned toward me confidentially. "There's another reason why you'll have to come with us, Fizzy, and you can't let me down. Trouble's broken out in camp. The boys 've split into two factions, and some of them want to desert because we're short of money and lost a lot of supplies in the flood, which I couldn't help. We've got to keep the company together until spring or we'll lose everything we've put into this—

time, money and work. The boys all thought a lot of you, and you always got along with everybody at the camp. Now, if you come to Roweburg with us, and jolly them along and show them you can take it, they'll stick it out for the winter. After the break-up, everything will be all right."

I realized that he was appealing to my vanity, but felt myself slipping nevertheless. The success or failure of Rowe, myself and the other twenty-two members of our company seemed to have been placed squarely on my shoulders. Such a thought was ridiculous, but I didn't see it that way then. Rowe had a way about him when he wanted his own way.

But I thought of the perils and privations of such a trip—the bitter cold, and, worst of all, the embarrassment a lone woman would suffer in a party composed entirely of men. I started to voice these thoughts.

"It's only seven days," Rowe interrupted, "seven short jumps with each night spent in a warm roadhouse. It's not much to ask when the future of the entire company's at stake."

With that I succumbed, just as I had in the past—just as I would again in the future. So now I, who had worried over being alone in the comparative civilization and comfort of Nome, was to set out on foot across a hundred miles of frozen wastes, for the desolate and uninhabited interior of Alaska.

In the morning, the weather was calm but bitterly cold. I used all but a few cents of my recent earnings and bought a lightweight parka of fawn skin. I slipped it on in the privacy of my tent.

At the back of my neck, the fawn's little head and two wee ears and white nose stuck out like those of a pet curling on my shoulder. The hood and wrists had been

trimmed with long white fox fur. A band of dark fox extended around the bottom. But though it was pretty, I feared it wouldn't be very serviceable. It was the best I could do, however, and I could only hope that it would substitute at least partially for the heavier garment I needed.

In other respects I was better off than the boys for the trip. I had a pair of heavy winter muckluks and warm fur mittens and a pair of lynx-skin stockings. I convinced myself that the next seven days wouldn't be so bad.

The sleds were piled high—gold pans, shovels, an 8x10 tent, a Yukon stove, a can of coal oil for the lantern and for starting fires, clothing, and other equipment. Since the trip was estimated at seven days, we carried rations only for ten—just enough to carry us through, with enough left over for three days' emergency. The winter's food supplies—those which hadn't been lost in the flood—had already been relayed to the Fox river camp.

The boys permitted me to stow a few personal things in the sleds, then dismantled my tent. I wanted to take my typewriter and other stenographic supplies, but Rowe insisted there wasn't room, and arranged to store them with a friend of his in Nome.

"I'll have all your stuff brought to Roweburg the next time I can get somebody to freight it over," he promised.

I had to be satisfied with that.

We set out on the morning of November tenth—five tenderfeet who knew little of the winter trail which lay ahead. Rowe had followed the summer trail several times—there were two trails, one for each season—but this swung north at Solomon, and we would be in new territory after that.

The snow lay deep and soft, and made the going desperately slow. We strung out along the trail, with Rowe and Monty dragging on the towropes of the first sled, and

Barry and Ed laboring at the second. Faust and I brought up the rear.

The men struggled against the drag of the snow. I tried to help them, but weighed so little I might as well have saved myself the effort.

Faust occasionally looked up at me as if to ask what brought all this on. He didn't seem happy about the trip. And he wasn't alone in that frame of mind.

On our right lay the Bering Sea, frozen as far as the eye could see. Ahead stretched a vast white desolation, darkened only occasionally by short, thin clumps of willows, whose twigs poked a few inches above the snow.

I asked, "Aren't there any trees?"

Rowe shook his head. "Not till we hit the Fox river—about ninety miles."

"How will we build fires?"

"Willows. They burn fast, but they're all right in a Yukon stove—if somebody chops them fast enough to keep the fire from burning out."

This did not sound encouraging. But I was to learn a lot about willow boughs and Yukon stoves. I was to learn a lot about many things.

I looked at the unchanging landscape and wondered if, in its new whiteness, it would confuse Rowe—if the landmarks had disappeared under the snow and we would become lost.

Our intended trip lay across the winter trail, which ran from Nome along the beach of Bering Sea to Cape Nome, then out the narrow spit of land to Port Safety. From Safety, we intended crossing the ice of the lagoon to Solomon, on the mainland at the mouth of the Solomon river. From Solomon, we would follow the beach to Topkok, then turn north to Roweburg on the Fox river, about fifteen miles below Council City. I realized that my fears of becoming lost were groundless. We simply were to

self each morning to the relative luxury of a brisk scrubbing in the snow. But from now on, I'd have to stay just as dirty as the old sourdough.

The day passed slowly, and I lay in my blankets utterly discouraged and miserable. The burns hurt me, and the raw salt in the bacon fat smarted like fire. But I could do nothing to ease the discomfort. Rowe, always the dreamer of great things, had neglected to bring a first aid kit, though he had known all along that most of Ed's medical supplies were lost.

Rowe! I ground my teeth. If he hadn't unnecessarily delayed our starting—if he hadn't insisted upon our taking the summer trail—if he hadn't waited until I thought the fire was out—if he had—I caught my thoughts and stifled them in shame. I had solicited Rowe's help in New York, when I was broke and desperate to come to Alaska. He had made room for me—had let me work out my passage and had bought my supplies. He wasn't deliberately vicious or careless. He meant well in all his undertakings, and usually suffered as much himself as did the others, to whom he brought calamity. I had asked to be taken to Alaska—had contracted to work for the company. Now I couldn't condemn him.

The loss of the coal oil was more serious than my burns. The can had emptied itself, and only a small amount lay in the bottom of the lantern—enough, perhaps, for one more night. After that, our tent would be in darkness for the rest of the trip. And at this time of year, the nights were nineteen hours long.

I felt myself succumbing again to my anger and disillusionment. I wanted to fly into Rowe and lay all our troubles at his feet. But I caught myself in time and remembered my resolution not to complain, regardless of how provoked. I'd keep on showing them that Fizzy could take it!

uncomfortable and dirty little cabin. A few boxes lay about and served as chairs. Four bunks rested directly beneath leaky spots in the roof. There was no stove, but our Yukon would keep us warm.

The storm raged on. The mouth of the creek became a morass. Occasional travelers passed, determined to complete the final nine miles to Nome. Some of them were using horses, and several of the animals foundered in the beds of quicksand which dotted the mouth of the creek. This meant long, hard, dirty work for us in helping the travelers to free their horses. One became so badly bogged, it died of exposure and overexertion.

The rain poured down. The days passed in deadly monotony. Our food supply dwindled. All travel on the trail ceased. Then, at the end of the seventh day, the rain stopped and bitter cold swept down overnight. Every last trace of snow had washed from the trail, but rain had gathered in pools on the ground and hardened. Travel would be hard, but not impossible.

We repacked the sleds and set out for Port Safety. Not until we had passed Cape Nome and started across the spit did Rowe give me an inkling of one of the many real reasons he had for insisting that I accompany them.

He had staked some claims on Beaver creek, which emptied into the lagoon about five miles north of Port Safety. The law called for one hundred dollars' worth of work annually on each twenty acres of placer property staked. This assessment work is credited by the government at ten dollars a day per person. As long as one hundred dollars in improvements are made on the land each year, the locator can hold it legally. But the improvement work must be performed before midnight of December thirty-first each year. After that time, the claim can be jumped.

Though Rowe hadn't mentioned doing this assessment work, he now told us of it.

"You won't have to come out to the claims, Fizzy. There's no sense in our hauling all this equipment out there and back, so you can stay with one of the women in Safety and keep an eye on the stuff till we get back."

I asked resignedly, "How long will it take?"

"Oh, not long at all. There'll be four of us, and that means forty dollars a day."

"How many claims are there?"

"Just a few."

That was as much as I could get out of him. But the prospect of a rest was not disappointing.

At Port Safety a fresh defeat awaited us. All but the Alaska Commercial Store still remained under water. There wasn't a woman in town.

Rowe said worriedly, "I can't leave you here."

"Why not? I can take care of myself—stay in the store and watch our supplies and wait till you get back."

But without another woman in town this would be impossible. I realized that I would have to make the trip to Beaver creek.

Rowe said, "There's no sense in hauling both the sleds and all this heavy stuff to Beaver and back. Monty can wait here and guard the supplies. Fizzy can come along and cook for us, and legally that'll be another ten dollars a day on the assessment work."

Rowe had an answer for everything.

We unloaded both sleds and piled the unneeded equipment in the rear of the store, then loaded the lighter sled with the barest necessities. Our provisions were so low that Rowe had to buy more.

Rowe gave me a little flour sack for my personal belongings. Without anyone's knowing, I bought a package

of mince meat, a can of chicken and a can of cranberry sauce in the store and tucked them away in the bag. Now we were prepared if Thanksgiving overtook us on the trail.

During the night, snow fell in great white clouds. By morning, the trail was buried, and the thermometer at the store registered ten below. The sky cleared, and we were ready to start.

We set out early, leaving Monty and Faust to guard the supplies. The going was hard in the new snow, but with first one of us, then the other breaking a trail, we made fairly good progress. We crossed the lagoon, then swung up Beaver creek. Hours passed. The cold bit through my light parka, and gradually a lassitude settled over me. I could scarcely lift my feet. Nothing registered plainly. I was aware only of being very, very tired.

We came to a clump of willows and I heard Rowe telling the boys we would camp there. Immediately I sagged into a snow bank and closed my eyes. A delicious drowsiness crept over me.

Ed jerked me to my feet and marched me back and forth, telling me it was fatal in severe weather to remain idle even a minute before the tent was up and the fire going. I struggled to sit down, but Ed continued rushing me back and forth. My drowsy feeling became one of utter misery. I pulled myself from Ed's grasp and refused to walk another step.

Rowe cunningly worked on my pride. "Come on, Fizzy; don't be a shirker. We're just as tired as you."

Barry said, "Chop some willows, Fizzy, while we put up the tent and the stove."

In this manner they awakened my pride, and I began angrily chopping willows. The harder I worked, the more miserable I felt and the angrier I became. It was some

time before I realized that the boys had saved me from freezing.

The boys raised the tent and built a fire. Barry strewed willow boughs, then spread our blankets. Ed set up the Yukon stove in a corner and stacked willows beside it. The wood burned almost as fast as tissue.

I sat in my blankets at the side of the tent while Ed rustled up supper: baking powder bread, bacon, warmed-over beans and canned tomatoes. The heat of the little stove warmed the tent, and after supper I fell back into my blankets, utterly exhausted, but warm for the first time that day. The men crawled into their blankets. In a few minutes, the tent rocked with their snores.

I had dozed while Ed fixed supper, and now prepared to go to sleep again; but as soon as the boys stopped feeding willow boughs to the stove, it lost its heat. I soon became wide awake with the cold, which became a thing alive—something which nipped and snapped at me. In the hurry of raising the tent and getting a fire going, nobody had banked the sides. Now the snow had settled from the weight of the willows and the bedding and our bodies, and an open space resulted between the lower sides of the tent and the snow-deep ground. An icy wind raced over me.

I pulled myself into a ball and tried to keep warm, but the air in the tent grew steadily colder. Every few minutes, I turned over, hoping to warm the side which, at that moment, felt as though it were frozen solid.

For about three hours I refrained from calling the boys. I wanted to stick out the night—wanted them to get their full night's rest after the hard day on the trail. But at last there was nothing else for me to do.

“Rowe!”

He sat up, half awake and startled. My anger had risen while I lay there and I began telling him how I felt about

the method he had used to inveigle me away from Nome. He muttered sleepily, and I saw he was so tired he failed to grasp anything I was saying.

My voice wakened the other boys, who looked about the tent in sleep-drugged exhaustion. They had done the best they could, and my discomfort was no fault of theirs. But they stumbled from their blankets and built a new fire and gathered additional willows and banked the sides of the tent. In a few minutes, each was back in his blankets, fast asleep.

I lay back and felt the warmth of the stove spreading throughout the tent. My body lost its chill and I became fairly comfortable again. But sleep evaded me. At last I sat up and fed willows to the stove until morning.

I knew that I couldn't stand another such night, and decided to return to Port Safety in the morning. I'd sleep in that store the next night if it was the last thing I ever did! No more tent for me.

When Rowe and the boys got up, I told them of my decision, adding that I'd walk back alone so as not to interfere with their work.

Rowe grinned absently and refused to believe I was serious. "You'll get used to it, Fizzy. It won't be so bad in a day or two."

Ed seemed alarmed. "You couldn't find your way back. You'd get lost."

"I'll follow the trail we made yesterday."

Now Rowe's easy grin disappeared. "You can't try a crazy thing like that. If a storm came up, those tracks would be wiped out and you'd be hopelessly lost in five minutes."

"I'm going just the same."

"Fizzy," cried Ed, "a storm or a sudden drop in temperature might mean death in the open. We couldn't take a chance on letting you walk back like that."

"She'll stay," said Rowe with finality. "She's got better sense than to try a thing like that."

I agreed somewhat reluctantly that their arguments weren't without basis, but I made no promises about not going.

"That's more like it," said Rowe, assuming that I was convinced. "We'll try to make you more comfortable after this."

Daylight came about nine o'clock in the morning, and they left the camp, to begin the assessment work on the claims. I watched them plow through the snow, then packed my flour sack and started alone for Port Safety.

The wind had nearly obliterated our trail of the previous day. This slowed me down greatly. Every few yards I would pause and scan the smooth surface before I could pick up the trail again. But I felt no cause for alarm, and felt I'd reach Port Safety without incident and long before dark, which came at about three o'clock.

After I had traveled about three miles, I noticed that the wind was rising. The light parka offered only minor protection, and I could feel the cold biting through my clothes and lashing at my face. The trail became more difficult to follow, more obscure on the white face of the earth.

Something hard and sharp stung my nose. I looked up at the sky. It had become sullen with leaden, low-scudding clouds. A snowflake hurried past. Another stung my face. I tried to increase my speed. The snow became a mist which dimmed the horizon and clogged the air and filled the last remnant of the trail I was trying to follow.

Still goaded by false pride and anger and disillusionment, I plowed ahead, simply hoping now that my direction was right. Visibility was almost nil. Snow whipped past at terrific speed, piling tiny drifts in my footsteps

almost as fast as I made them. I became colder and colder—more confused, more tired.

At last I admitted to myself that I was lost—that I had no idea of direction. I wanted suddenly to push blindly ahead, to scream at the top of my voice and run until somebody found me, but I overcame my terror and forced myself to think.

I knew that I must keep moving, that if I once stopped and sat down I was lost for good. But I didn't know in which direction to walk. I had heard that people who were lost always walked in circles and consequently got nowhere. It wasn't an encouraging thought.

By now the matters of pride and anger and disillusionment were no longer of importance. The cold tent and the bed on the willow boughs took on a new value. If I could only get back to them—I kept moving, unable to decide whether the simplest course was for me to sit down and freeze quickly, try to find my way back to camp, or hope that I was still headed toward Port Safety.

Time passed. I kept telling myself that the boys would soon miss me and start a search. Perhaps they were looking for me at this very minute. Then I recalled that the boys were doing assessment work and wouldn't return to the camp until darkness fell. . . . A long way off.

Yes, a long way off. And I knew that by that time I'd be frozen if I didn't keep moving. And how could I keep moving against that snow and wind, when I was so tired and had been up all night? And cold—my feet had become blocks of ice which somehow pushed me ahead.

I had given up hope, and kept moving automatically, when I thought I heard a shout.

"Hello-ooo!" I screamed into the wild storm.

"Fizz-y-y-y!" came the faint, muffled response. "Where are you?"

Guiding each other by our shouts we came together.

Rowe and Barry loomed out of the blowing snow. It was like being snatched from the grave.

Their relief at finding me turned immediately to bitter anger. I had deliberately jeopardized not only my own life but theirs. I had violated a stern code of the north. Didn't I realize they would set out to look for me as soon as they missed me? Did I know that only the storm had brought them in early from the claims—that otherwise I'd have wandered on and on, until I froze? How could I have done such a thing?

I boiled over. "You had no business taking me on a trip like this. What do you expect when you make me sleep in an icy tent and expect me to stand up just like some man who's been on the trail all his life?"

Rowe's anger faded. "I'm sorry, Fizzy. It'll only be for a little while."

"Yes, like your easy little seven-day jaunt, which has already stretched into more than two weeks!"

Barry started calling, and from a distance, Ed answered. The storm was so bad that Rowe and Barry had to leave Ed at the camp, to guide us back with his voice.

In only a few minutes, we reached the camp. I had run true to tradition and walked in circles.

I was deeply ashamed over what I had done. Rowe and Barry might have been lost searching for me. It had happened to many a rescue party in Alaska.

But my rebellion produced some results. Rowe immediately made me more comfortable by changing the position of the blankets. I was to sleep in the middle of the tent from now on. With Rowe and Barry on one side and Ed on the other, the cold wind would have a more difficult task in reaching me.

As my anger died that night and remorse set in, I vowed that I'd never again, through carelessness or deliberately, place another's life in jeopardy. Even

though I had been misled by Rowe and would never have come on the trip had I known his true intentions, I shouldn't have walked off from the camp and endangered the boys' lives in the search which I should have known would follow.

I made another vow—one which I tried to keep during all the years that followed: anger would never again gain an upper hand and keep me from using common sense—not anger nor panic nor disillusionment nor pride. Nor would I ever again complain or cause anxiety over conditions beyond everyone's control. From then on, I'd show every man in Alaska that I could take it without whimpering or wanting to run home. . . .

On this comforting thought, I fell asleep.

Thanksgiving Day fell on November twenty-ninth that year—a cold, clear day without a breath of air stirring. The boys had evidently overlooked the date when they left for the assessment work that morning, and I said nothing to enlighten them. They expected the usual beans, bread, bacon and coffee for supper when they returned. But I got out my secret supply of canned goods and started preparing a Thanksgiving dinner.

I had only a frying pan and a coffee pot with which to work, but I hoped to effect the change of menu with these two implements. It was a long and wearisome task. Most of my time was occupied in melting water for the coffee and keeping enough willow boughs on hand to retain fire in the stove. The canned goods were frozen solid, and took unending hours to thaw. But by the time the boys returned from their quasi-assessment work on the claims, a dinner of creamed chicken, beans, cranberry sauce, plum pudding with sauce made from canned milk, and coffee was ready and waiting on the table.

They simply looked at the food and didn't speak for a

few moments. Then Barry laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Fizzy, you're a brick."

Rowe and Ed muttered thanks, and we fell to it.

For two weeks we earned forty dollars a day and finished up the 1900 assessment work on all our claims on Beaver creek. The work in itself was a farce. In mid-winter, almost nothing could be accomplished, but we were there, and we worked on the claims, and this comprised assessment work in the eyes of the law.

When we reached Port Safety, a month had passed on this trip which was to have taken only seven days. Our money was nearly gone, and our supplies again had to be replenished. Yet, the long, hard part of our journey still lay ahead.

Monty and Faust were weary of lying around Safety, and looked forward eagerly to getting back on the trail. We reloaded the sleds and set out across the frozen lagoon for Solomon, a distance of eleven miles, which we were making in bright moonlight.

I realized almost at once that this trip across the ice would be harder than anything I had ever before done in my life. The ice had been swept entirely clean by the wind, and had been polished and repolished by the rushing grains of snow until it offered no footing at all. The surface was like a spinning top. You put your foot down, and it wasn't there. Each inch was a fight to remain erect.

The boys and I were ignorant of the north, but Rowe should have known—should have followed proper procedure before starting with us across the ice. But we followed him like dumb, trusting sheep, implicitly believing that we were doing only what had to be done. Our smooth muckluks found no surface to grip on the ice. Rowe, as the leader of any northern expedition, should have known we'd need creepers to cross that ice, and should have prepared for it.

Our plight was terrible. We would take a step, slip, fall, then get up to slip and fall again. The men strained at the heavy sleds. Even my dog couldn't walk, for, dig as he would at the ice with his nails, his legs would go out from under him and only after much struggling could he regain his feet.

My entire body became bruised and battered from my falls. My feet and ankles changed into two tortured stumps that throbbed and ached and threatened to give out entirely. And all about us was nothing but ice and dark night sky and snowy hills with a moon peering over their crest a thousand feet above the distant shore of the lagoon. But we had no inclination to pause and admire the savage night beauty. Every faculty remained centered on the task of placing one foot before the other.

The hours passed. The fight went on to reach Solomon. Nothing changed—the darkness, the desolate reaches of glare ice, the slipping and falling, the battle to keep the sleds moving.

Suddenly Ed cried, "Isn't that a light?"

I looked up, saw the faint yellow gleam from deep within the darkness.

"It's the roadhouse at Solomon," announced Rowe.

"How far?"

"Only a mile or so."

On and on, foot by foot, toward the yellow eye. Now I no longer watched the ice, but centered my attention on that dot of light shining ahead. It became my goal, my one aim; beyond reaching that light I had no thought. As a result of my failure to concentrate, my falls became more frequent. And the light, like the hands of a watched clock, remained the same.

More hours passed. My feet and ankles became numb with pain and cold. I tried to help with the slipping sleds,

but most of the time I was simply clinging to the handle-bars to keep from falling.

I started thinking of the hundreds of tin cans I had opened and thrown away. Just one of those cans might now prove my salvation—might have been made into a pair of crude creepers which could be slipped over the muckluks. But there was no use in thinking of them. We had no empty cans, and our full cans could not be emptied; their contents were frozen solid. . . . Faust slipped along stiff-legged behind us.

“How much farther?”

“Only about a mile.”

“That’s what you said before.”

“Have patience.”

Again, the creep forward toward the light. An hour passed. The light seemed no nearer.

“How much farther?”

“Only a mile.”

We reached the roadhouse just ten hours after leaving Port Safety. . . . Ten hours of struggling and slipping and falling to cover eleven miles of glare ice.

Chapter Six

THIS portion of the trip affected me worse than any of the other members of the party. The boys had been on the trail all summer, and had toughened their leg and foot muscles. And Rowe, from his summer work and past years in Alaska, was so hardened to mushing he had almost no ill effects. But by the time we reached the roadhouse at Solomon, I could scarcely cling to the handlebars of the sleds and stumble along. I had never before walked more than a few miles at a time, and then only under the most favorable of conditions. But this muscle-wrenching trip across the ice— It was more than tender, inexperienced feet could bear.

When we finally reached the roadhouse—a small single-roomed cabin with double-decker bunks along two walls—my ankles were so swollen that the boys feared they would have to cut off my muckluks. That would have been the end of the trip for me right then. But I was spared this terrifying loss when Monty and Ed, after much pulling and jerking, managed to get the muckluks from my feet.

I looked at my ankles in horror. They were swollen severely, and banded in various shades of purple and blue. I wondered if I could ever use them again.

Ed wanted to rub them with alcohol, but the keeper of the roadhouse had none. Whiskey was used as a substitute.

Two other travelers were stopping in the roadhouse—a young fellow with a mean eye and an old, dirty, whiskered sourdough. The young fellow was traveling alone and fast. He had a light sled and a three-dog team. The sourdough, whom we promptly named Whiskers, was destitute. The roadhouse keeper had staked him to a bunk and lodgings until he could join a party going to Council City. Whiskers' worldly possessions consisted of an ancient mongrel named Gyp, some blankets, a small, battered sled, a box of hardtack and some dog food. He had heard of a strike near Council—rumors of strikes made the rounds constantly—and was heading there in hope of finding a fortune.

Rowe began talking with the younger man and learned that he too was going to Council.

"As long as we're all heading the same way, you might as well join our party."

The young fellow nodded. "I was fixing to ask you."

Whiskers said, "How about me trailing along too? The weather might change, and I ain't got no tent."

"Come right ahead," said Rowe.

I could have wept. Whiskers seemed a likeable old man at heart, but he was the dirtiest sourdough I'd seen in Alaska. I wanted to cry out an objection, for he was probably alive with vermin, but Rowe had agreed to take him, and there was nothing to be said now. I consoled myself with the thought that we'd be putting up at roadhouses each night, and, since the sourdough had no money, he'd either be using our tent, or would be sleeping far from

me if he secured further credit from the roadhouses along the trail.

In the morning, little of the swelling had gone from my ankles. Rowe wanted to lay over another day, but we had so little money I decided to push on. There would be no more glare ice to cross, and I felt, further, that the day's mush might loosen up my muscles and in the end cause me less misery than if I lay idly around the roadhouse.

We lined up our sleds outside the roadhouse—the young man's sled, then Whiskers', then ours. But instead of pushing on at once, Rowe gathered us together and told us of a plan he had worked out during the night and evidently decided to spring upon us at the last possible moment.

At Solomon, the trails split. The summer trail, which cut seven miles from the trip to Council or Roweburg, swung north along the Solomon river to the East Fork and then to the Fox river. The winter trail, which was traveled exclusively after snow fell, continued along the beach to Topkok before turning north. There were roadhouses along this winter trail, but once a traveler set out on the summer trail, he traveled through uninhabited desolation until he reached Council.

Rowe said, "You know, if we take the winter trail up through Topkok, we'll go seven miles out of our way. And that's a long way to haul these heavy sleds. My idea is for us to turn off here and follow the summer trail. I've been over it several times." Now his words were directed at Whiskers and the younger man. "When we leave you at Fox river, you'll be only seven miles from Council."

Whiskers shrugged, but the other man immediately vetoed Rowe's plan.

"Nothing doing. If a storm catches you on that summer trail, it'll be just too bad. I'm taking the winter trail."

"But there's no danger," urged Rowe. "I know the summer trail by heart. It'll mean easier traveling and will save us almost a day's trip."

"Just the same, I'm sticking to the regular trail. If a storm comes up I can at least reach a roadhouse."

Rowe shrugged. "Suit yourself." He turned to Whiskers. "How about you?"

"I don't know much about that summer trail in winter, but I ain't got much choice. You've got a tent, and I'll have to sleep in something between here and Council."

"You'll be sleeping under the snow if a storm catches you!" hollered the young man.

He yelled at his dogs, and soon became a dot moving swiftly across the face of the snow.

Rowe muttered easily, "He was afraid he'd have to break a trail for us all the way."

I said, "I hope he wasn't right about the danger." And then another thought came to me. "If we stuck to the winter trail and stayed in roadhouses, wouldn't we more than offset those seven miles by the time we'd save in not putting up and taking down the tent?"

Rowe smiled confidently. "That's just another reason why we're taking the summer trail. I left three big tents standing along the relay trail—tents we used after the Fox froze and we were freighting supplies overland. They'll save us the trouble of putting up and taking down our own, as well as the expense of the roadhouses."

Rowe had his answer ready, as usual.

Faust and Gyp sniffed at each other and quickly made friends. Then we started out, with Whiskers and Gyp breaking the trail and the rest of us in our regular order.

The wind blew bitterly down the Solomon, with never a tree to break its force. The cold needled through my light parka like birdshot through paper.

"Doesn't the wind ever stop blowing here?" I called.

"We'll hit trees at Fox river," said Rowe.

"How far is it?"

"About twenty-two miles."

Twenty-two miles. . . . I thought dark things of Rowe as I lowered my head and again tried to help in moving the heavy sleds.

The Solomon lay buried under a thick layer of snow, and made progress doubly hard for me. My ankles were stiff and sore, and each step was an effort, but at last the exercise began to loosen the muscles, and progress was not so difficult. I felt that I became of more use to the men, who struggled endlessly at the towlines of the sleds. Now Rowe's reason for inviting Whiskers and the young fellow to accompany us became apparent. And the reason, as usual, lay in our leader's aversion to work. With Whiskers and Gyp opening a trail, our task became just that much easier.

Rowe cast a glance back at me. I smiled, and his brow wrinkled in perplexity. I couldn't hate the man for trying to ease our task.

We pushed steadily up the frozen Solomon. No trees, no rocks—nothing but the unending white surface and the little foothills rising around us. Short clumps of willows occasionally darkened the snow. But that was all. No game, no sign of life whatsoever. None of the deer or bear or other animals one naturally expected to find in Alaska. For this part of the country was the section one never heard about—like the thousands of square miles of wasteland which cover a great portion of California—treeless, barren, desolate.

Whiskers shouted, "Watch out here! May be an overflow!"

Overflow! An unfrozen spot in the river, drifted across and completely covered with snow, but somehow sensed by Whiskers or his dog. The overflows lay like traps all over the waterways of Alaska. A plunge into one of them meant serious consequences—frozen limbs, amputation, possibly death. Warily, we skirted the suspected spot.

Faust paused, as all dogs have paused since time immemorial, beside a clump of willows. In a moment, he hopped on ahead. The time had arrived which I had thought of with dread—the bitter embarrassments a lone woman would suffer in a party otherwise composed entirely of men.

I dropped back from the sled, let the men pull away from me while I waited by the willow clump, hoped they wouldn't notice my absence. But one of them looked back, and the party halted.

Chagrined, I caught up with them, then lagged behind again at the next clump of willows. Once more, the men stopped and waited while I caught up with them.

"If we're traveling too fast for those sore ankles, just say the word, Fizzy," remarked Rowe.

I thought for a moment, wondered how I could tell them with the least embarrassment and without being indelicate.

At last I said, "I don't know how many of you are Bible students, but I suppose you've all heard the story of Lot's wife."

Rowe's forehead wrinkled. Ed looked puzzled, then suddenly reddened in a slow grin. Whiskers and Barry and Monty failed to comprehend. There was nothing to do but be more explicit.

"I mean there'll be several pillars of salt left here on the Solomon if you look back again when I drop behind."

There was no further difficulty from that source.

Though I had doubted Rowe's judgment in taking the summer trail, his decision was borne out at the end of the first day's journey up the Solomon. The tent which he had used during the moving of the supplies was standing and ready for us to occupy.

The march had been hard. My ankles hurt, and we were completely fagged. But when we came upon the tent, almost buried but perfectly banked in snow, with plenty of willows growing nearby, my doubts of our leader's ability faded.

"Thanks," I said, "for insisting. If I had to cut willows while you put up the tent, I'd die in my tracks."

He smiled lazily. "Even Rowe can be right once in a while."

In a few moments, the sides of the little Yukon stove glowed red.

Whiskers helped us as much as he could, cutting willows and carrying in some of the provisions, but he was so old and rheumatic his efforts didn't go far. He waited until each of us had spread his blankets, then brought in his own with twinkling eye.

His lips parted in the lantern light, and stained yellow teeth glistened behind his dirty gray beard.

"I'll kinda keep my blankets back a bit. Some of this livestock of mine's big enough t' jump right over the stove."

Lice! I had known he had them!

In the morning, a wind had arisen, and now kicked the loose snow into gusty clouds. Rowe looked gloomily out of the tent, but said nothing. Travel through these minor squalls might at times become uncomfortable, but we felt there was not the slightest danger. I let the fire die down while the boys loaded the sleds.

Then Rowe, alert for a chance to procrastinate, chose the weather conditions as an excuse for our laying over a day.

"We can't take a chance," he said. "There might be a bad storm ahead."

"That's just loose snow, Mr. Rowe," said Whiskers. "It don't mean there's a storm coming."

"No use taking chances. A day one way or the other won't make much difference."

Monty growled, "What's the idea? At this rate we'll be lucky if we reach camp by New Year's."

It was only one of the many times I couldn't fathom Rowe. He would do things like this—insist upon doing something the harder way, which was utterly uncharacteristic—then seek some loophole to evade completing the task.

I got the coal-oil can from the sled while the boys began carrying the food and bedding back into the tent. When I opened the stove, the ashes were black. I splashed coal oil on them. A whoosh. A roar. A sheet of flame. A blast of fire in my face. The smell of scorched hair.

Monty grabbed me as I stumbled away from the stove. Barry slammed shut the door, to save the tent from catching fire. Ed suddenly cried, "The coal oil!"

I had dropped the can. Not until now did anyone notice it lying on the ground. All of the oil had drained away.

The loss of Ed's instruments and drugs and medical supplies was felt for the first time. He could do nothing for me except rub my burned hands and face with bacon fat.

"No more washing in the snow," said young Doctor Ed. "All we can do is keep the skin moist with bacon fat and try not to irritate it."

I sighed in resignation. Previously, I had treated my-

self each morning to the relative luxury of a brisk scrubbing in the snow. But from now on, I'd have to stay just as dirty as the old sourdough.

The day passed slowly, and I lay in my blankets utterly discouraged and miserable. The burns hurt me, and the raw salt in the bacon fat smarted like fire. But I could do nothing to ease the discomfort. Rowe, always the dreamer of great things, had neglected to bring a first aid kit, though he had known all along that most of Ed's medical supplies were lost.

Rowe! I ground my teeth. If he hadn't unnecessarily delayed our starting—if he hadn't insisted upon our taking the summer trail—if he hadn't waited until I thought the fire was out—if he had—I caught my thoughts and stifled them in shame. I had solicited Rowe's help in New York, when I was broke and desperate to come to Alaska. He had made room for me—had let me work out my passage and had bought my supplies. He wasn't deliberately vicious or careless. He meant well in all his undertakings, and usually suffered as much himself as did the others, to whom he brought calamity. I had asked to be taken to Alaska—had contracted to work for the company. Now I couldn't condemn him.

The loss of the coal oil was more serious than my burns. The can had emptied itself, and only a small amount lay in the bottom of the lantern—enough, perhaps, for one more night. After that, our tent would be in darkness for the rest of the trip. And at this time of year, the nights were nineteen hours long.

I felt myself succumbing again to my anger and disillusionment. I wanted to fly into Rowe and lay all our troubles at his feet. But I caught myself in time and remembered my resolution not to complain, regardless of how provoked. I'd keep on showing them that Fizzy could take it!

That night I was lying in my blankets when Rowe suddenly cried, "This itching's driving me crazy!"

He tore off his shirt, squatted tailor-fashion, and there in the lantern light started examining his shirt. My eyes had been closed but I opened them and sickened and turned over.

Rowe muttered sadly, "I thought so." I turned over again as Rowe looked up. "I'm lousy as a sheep dog," he added.

As if in response to a cue, the sourdough's mongrel cocked a hind leg and scratched his ear vigorously.* The men eyed the little by-play, then broke into spontaneous laughter. Rowe frowned and started searching his shirt. I closed my eyes and shuddered. If my mother ever learned of this—my gentle, refined mother, who probably had never even seen a louse, whose very existence spelled cleanliness and neatness and order, who, since I could first remember, seemed always to be telling me, "Fannie Ella, keep your shoulders up. Fannie Ella, hold your head erect. Fannie Ella, there's a spot on your shirt. Fannie Ella, don't cross your legs." Poor mother. If she could see her Fannie Ella now, dirty and tired and burned and discouraged, in a tent a thousand miles from nowhere, watching, in horrified fascination, while one man counted the lice he plucked from his shirt and three others took up the chorus in high glee.

Rowe muttered, "One, two, three, four—"

The others repeated the count in hilarious crescendo.

Poor mother, indeed. And poor Fannie Ella, who had followed the trail of fame and fortune to this. . . . I blinked and shuddered and felt very sorry for myself.

"Eight, nine, ten, eleven—"

The chorus roared out in singsong fashion. I closed my

* Dogs in Alaska and the Far North do not have fleas.—J. O.

eyes and tried to close my mind to the stabbing little bites which suddenly covered my body.

"Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three—"

Ed cried, "Hey, this's making me feel as though I've got 'em myself!"

"Maybe you have," grinned Whiskers encouragingly. "I slept with a Rooshian about a year ago, and I ain't been able to get rid of 'em since."

"Aren't you the helpful little soul!" growled Monty.

Timidly, I reached beneath the blankets, afraid of what I might find, but driven in desperation to scratch at least one of the countless bites. For a moment, I knew complete bliss. Then my imagination went to work again.

Whiskers drawled, "They ain't so bad, once you get used to 'em. In the summer, you can turn your shirt inside out every once in a while and let 'em tire themselves out running back and forth. Of course it's different in the winter." He scratched himself thoughtfully.

The lantern started flickering as the last of the oil burned away. Rowe blew out the flame, then snuffed a spark from the smoldering wick.

"Well, that's that," he muttered, and I heard him crawling back into his shirt. "I guess I can stand them if they can stand me."

He may not have been a natural leader or a good organizer, but he'd always get along.

We started before daylight the next morning, in bitter cold and deep snow. My face smarted from its burns, and Ed added to this by again rubbing them with bacon fat. The salt in the meat stung like fire, but when we were again on the trail, the cold numbed the pain and I was less miserable.

We had come about five miles above the mouth of the Solomon, but Rowe said we must travel twelve miles this

day to reach the second tent. Speed would be essential to cover this distance in one day.

When daylight broke, Whiskers eyed the leaden sky and sniffed knowingly. "She's a-comin'," he announced gravely. "A blizzard."

We dug into our task. Mile after mile slipped past. The clumps of willows became shorter and sparser. Darkness banged down, but we plowed ahead. More miles. More unchanging desolation. No second tent.

Rowe said, "Everything's changed since I was here. Too much snow."

"Don't you know where the tent is?" I asked.

"We should find it any minute now."

The temperature dropped as the wind increased in force. We pushed against its wicked lash, hoping that the tent would appear just beyond the next bend.

Then the storm was upon us—an almost physical barrier which held us back. One moment the air had been clear and thin; the next instant the blizzard had swept down on us.

The wind mounted steadily, the snow fell thicker and thicker, but we kept going. Not in hope of locating the second tent or of lessening the distance to Roweburg, but because we had to find willows.

At last we came to the East Fork, and left the main channel of the Solomon. The storm raged on, growing wilder, more savage.

Whiskers shouted, and his voice blew back a thin whisper, "Worst I ever seen!"

We could believe it.

Then we came to a clump of willows—small and sparse. As a fuel supply, they would be inadequate for any length of time. But we had no choice. If we continued farther, there might be no more willows at all.

While the boys raised the tent, I chopped willows and

stacked them beside the stove. But we were too tired and too cold to cook anything. We ate a little of Whiskers' hardtack and crawled into our blankets.

But there was little sleep for any of us that night. The stove pipe rattled constantly, and, with the fire now out, the tent became so cold we lost all thought of sleep.

Barry started to rekindle the fire. Whiskers warned, "Don't try that, son. Your pipe's fulla snow. The smoke'll drive you out."

Barry ignored the old man's warning. In a few moments, the tent billowed with smoke. We rushed out into the storm, choking and gasping. Whiskers pulled back the flap and waited for the smoke to clear. And at last, cold and covered with snow, we returned to our blankets and lay in the darkness and tried to get warm again. But the snow which had clung to our clothes now melted from the heat of our bodies, dampening the blankets. It was doubly hard to bear, lying in the dark, without the friendly glow of the lantern.

At last Whiskers said, "This ain't my tent, and it ain't my place to tell you people what to do. But many a good man's died from trying to build a fire in his tent during a storm like this."

Barry said, "I thought the heat'd melt the snow."

"It would if the fire was going when the storm started. But not after the pipe's once filled with snow—and you needn't try to take it down and clean it out. It'd just fill again while you were putting it back up."

"You mean we'll have to wait out this storm without any fire at all?"

Whiskers coughed apologetically. "It may not be long. Jest stay in your blankets and try to keep warm. That's the safest way."

By now I liked the old sourdough, lice and all.

I dozed for a few minutes, then awoke, strangling.

Once again, the tent billowed with smoke. Once again, the rush into the storm, the wait for the smoke to clear, and the return to cold blankets, frozen this time from the melted snow. Barry had got up, cleared the pipe, and tried once more to build a fire. It seemed as though he simply wouldn't learn.

This was the beginning of our crowded days in the little 8x10 tent which sheltered Rowe, Barry, Ed, Monty, Whiskers, the two dogs and me. Somehow we contrived also to crowd into the tent our Yukon stove,* our slim supply of rations, the sourdough's box of hardtack, and the dog food.

Sleeping was a continual nightmare. We lay in a row, six of us huddled together for warmth in less than ten feet of space, so closely packed that each was against the next. If our positions became cramped and we wished to turn over, all the others had to be wakened and, like a sequence of six in a bed in a 1915 screen comedy, shifted at one time. Whiskers and I were fortunate in having our dogs to sleep with and help keep us warm.

The storm became so bad there was grave danger even in stepping outside the tent. The blowing snow blotted out everything—the tent, the willow clump, the surrounding ground. It was like being lost in a sea of cold, angry white clouds. To wander more than arm's length from the tent would mean sure and quick death.

Whiskers had brought a few feet of rope into the tent from his sled, another thing which Rowe had overlooked. When we went outside, one end of the sourdough's rope was tied around our waist. The dogs were treated likewise.

The first night passed and the next day. We lay dozing fitfully in the icy tent. There could be no cooked food until the storm ended and a fire was built. The slender

* A Yukon stove emits no light.—J. O.

supply of willow boughs lay by the stove unused. The wind ripped and tore at the tent.

The nights and most of the days were hours of unbroken darkness. Daylight lasted only a short while and daily grew shorter. All of us tried to sleep away the time. I would lie quietly on my side until my hip felt as though it were paralyzed. The burns on my hands and face pained constantly, but now I could have no relief at all, since the bacon was a frozen chunk, and no grease could be coaxed from it without fire.

Finally the pain would be too much. Sciatica would set in; rheumatism, to which I had been subjected since I was a child, would start throbbing. I just wanted to die.

Faust would get too warm under the blankets, and I'd let him out. But within a few minutes the cold of the tent would set him to nuzzling the hem of the blankets and he'd crawl back in, shivering from the short exposure.

If hunger gnawed too ravenously, we munched on Whiskers' hardtack. And I came to realize with shame that this old man, whom I'd first resented and whom I'd even deplored having in our party, was possibly saving our lives. Our food supply, frozen as it was, could not be eaten without fire. We'd have had nothing to eat at all during those days in the tent, if Whiskers hadn't been there with his hardtack.

And our food supply was low. If we were long on the trail after the storm, there wouldn't be enough to carry us to Roweburg. Mentally I added up the remaining miles as closely as I could guess: East Fork to head of Fox river, ten miles; head of Fox river to point where Whiskers would leave us for Council City, ten miles; this point to Roweburg at the mouth of the Fox, about eight or ten miles. Nearly thirty miles in all. But this wasn't bad—didn't seem far, now that we had already come over half-way. We should cover it in three or four days at the most.

Outside, the snow piled deeper and deeper, and the wild wind roared around the tent, and the nights remained long and black and filled with fearsome noises. We talked of many things—anything, just to occupy our minds. We learned that even the sourdough had lived in New York, and we marveled at six New Yorkers being caught together in an Alaska blizzard. Someone would mention Sherry's or Delmonico's or a ride on the elevated, and we would tremble in fruitless desire.

The hours slipped past; the hardtack dwindled; the storm raged on.

I think it was on the third night that Rowe unconsciously mentioned a divide which lay ahead. The word slipped out casually, as though he hadn't been thinking. Each of us came to immediate life.

"Divide?" I asked. "What divide?"

"Oh, it's not really a divide. They just call it that. It's only a small foothill about five miles ahead."

I heard Barry sitting up in his blankets. "We don't have to cross it, do we?"

"Well, yes—that is, there's no way of going around it very readily. But it isn't anything to worry about. As far as that goes, neither of them amounts to much."

"Neither of them!" Barry fell back on the blankets. "Oh, Lord!"

"Two of them?" I asked.

Rowe spoke easily. "Now, there's no use getting excited about a little thing like that. They're just small hills about a thousand feet high. I hadn't even thought of them or I'd have told you before."

A thousand feet. That didn't sound as bad as the ominous word "divide."

During the first day, hunger gnawed at me continuously, but after that all consciousness of hunger died. I puzzled over this, for normally I had a good appetite, and,

since our stop, had eaten nothing but hardtack, with mouthfuls of snow to quench my thirst. Ed told me that people experience few pangs of hunger after the first few days. As the time passed in the crowded tent, Ed's words returned to torment me. I agonized myself with the thought that I might be starving to death, that I had one of the symptoms in my lack of hunger. I even imagined I was growing weak. These imaginings were only the beginning of thoughts which would harass me during days to come.

We tried to occupy our minds with plans of what we would do after the storm blew itself out. Rowe told us of a bunch of claims he had staked the previous year at a place called Hitch Hatch's IXL camp. The assessment work for 1899 had been performed, but nothing had been done this year. The claims had shown good indications, and Rowe thought it would be a shame to lose them, which would be the case if the assessment work was not put in.

The date was now well into December, and there wasn't time to perform the assessment work in full before the claims automatically were open to jumping on the first of the year.

"What we should do," suggested Rowe, "is head for those claims and be there at midnight December thirty-first. Right after that we can restake them under different names."

"We'll be doing well if we manage to work all the claims we have now," said Monty. "I think we ought to head for Roweburg. We're sure of at least getting something to eat there."

"But these claims have pay dirt in them!" cried Rowe, suddenly roused. "We can't lose them. And as far as that goes, there'll probably be food at the IXL. If Hitch Hatch isn't there, he'll leave a cache."

"We aren't in any shape to walk that far and pull the sleds," argued Monty. "We'd better go to Roweburg first. Then we can go on to that camp after we've stocked up."

"But the IXL is right on the way. It isn't as far as Roweburg."

That put a different light on the matter. If there was food there and rest, we were all for it.

I asked, "How much work is there to restaking?"

"None at all. You just put your location notices on the old stake and have witnesses there same as any other claim. I've got the notices all made out. They're in your names and the names of people who gave me a power of attorney."

Monty coughed knowingly. "All made out, eh? Then this is the real reason you insisted on coming across the summer trail?"

Rowe chuckled triumphantly. "There's plenty of gold there, and we're going to get it."

I wanted to ask why he hadn't got it for his company last year, but held my peace.

At last, the storm blew itself out, and on the morning of the seventh day we could safely step from the tent without the rope. Deep snow covered everything—the hills, the river, the willows, the tent. Not a cloud marred the sky; the weather was bitterly cold—that sharp, penetrating cold which follows a storm and plummets the thermometer to sixty-five below. But it was good to be outdoors again, to move about and stand erect like human beings.

The first divide, which Rowe mentioned so casually, lay far ahead—a line of white against the sky. Not until then did I realize how high a thousand feet could be. A thousand, icy, snow-buried feet. Rowe expected us to move those sleds and that freight—nearly a pound of it

for every foot we would climb—across that barrier. And then, I remembered, we would be called upon to do it all over again at the second divide. The task looked hopeless.

Over a month had passed since we started on this short, easy jaunt, which was to have taken a week. And, as had been the case at every other stop, the worst still lay ahead. Days, even weeks, might pass before we could scale those divides and arrive at the IXL camp. Weeks of cold and misery and brutal, backbreaking labor. And, worst of all, hunger.

On the thought, I caught myself. Hunger. There would be no weeks of hunger ahead. Days, perhaps, but not weeks. We had just so much food. It would carry us just so far. After that, with no chance of replenishing our supplies in this barren, desolate land—

I pulled out the grub box and took stock of the provisions. Enough coffee for three pots, a one-pound can of beef, a one-pound can of tomatoes, flour for four days, a small slab of bacon, three tiny potatoes, one onion, a little of Whiskers' hardtack, six or eight meals for the dogs. That was to carry six adults and two dogs indefinitely.

Our predicament wakened us to Rowe's incompetency. No amount of glossing over or brushing aside could blind us to what now lay ahead. Those divides would be a terrible struggle to conquer. Days would be lost in crossing them—days when our food supply would grow less and less. We didn't fool ourselves any longer. Even with the wildest sort of luck, we couldn't move those heavy sleds through the deep snow, over the divides, and into the IXL in less than a week. And this would mean a week of desperate labor—a week when not one minute could be wasted. The supplies would go over the divides a few

pounds at a time. It would mean many trips up and down the face of the steep hills. But it was the only way we could avoid abandoning our equipment—our gold pans and shovels and other necessities which would make us rich in the spring. For we knew that if we left the supplies there just beyond the East Fork, they would either be washed away in the spring floods or ruined before we could return for them. And gold burned fiercely in our hearts and our souls. We had come seven thousand miles for it. We would not abandon the very equipment which would ensure our traveling the trail home successfully.

The boys accepted the situation without flinching, and we rationed the food for seven days. We could only hope that another storm would not catch us.

Starting out that day was impossible, desperate as we were for time. The tent lay almost completely buried. The stovepipe had blown off and we spent hours locating it and setting it in place. Not only were we cold, but the exercise and moving about had made us ravenously hungry.

While the boys set out to break a trail afoot to the bottom of the first divide, I started brewing a pot of coffee, and began thawing the bacon. It was a long, slow, tedious task. The tiny willows flamed up and died. I rushed outside and chopped more. I filled the coffee pot with snow, watched it melt, filled it with more snow. The bacon remained a frozen clod which I couldn't dent.

Hours passed, but when the boys returned from breaking the trail, the coffee boiled and the bacon simmered in the pan. We rounded out the meal with a little of Whiskers' hardtack, fed the dogs, then flung ourselves exhausted into our blankets. When the last willow bough burned out, the bitter outside cold knifed into the tent.

I lay in the darkness, listening to a silence so vast, so

deep, it almost hurt my ears. Ahead of us lay the unknown trail, unrecognized even by Rowe in its winter camouflage. If we made one mistake, if a storm overtook us again, if anything at all delayed us—

I closed my eyes unhappily and tried to shut the numbing thoughts from my mind.

Chapter Seven

IN THE morning, we broke camp in darkness, then began to move the sleds to the base of the first divide. It was simply a taste of what lay ahead, yet we fought for each bit of ground. The boys threw themselves against the towropes like frightened horses struggling to drag a heavy load from the scene of their terror. I floundered about in the loose snow of the trail, helping when I could. My heart pounded; my breaths rose white; weariness like a steel band numbed my brain.

At last we reached the beginning of the ascent and got the tent up and a fire going before we could relax. Supper consisted of only a little of the sourdough's hardtack. We were too tired to cook—almost too tired even to eat—and fell almost at once into exhausted slumber.

Next day, the relay work began up the face of the divide. Here the snow lay above our waists, but we broke a trail from the bottom to the top. There I paused momentarily and looked down into miles and miles of snow and low, rolling hills. And then I saw it—the second divide, raising its head against the clear sky. And as I stood

there, high above the world, with a bitter wind cutting through my clothes, I reached my lowest ebb. Then I remembered my pledge and turned from the summit and began the descent to our camp at the bottom.

The work started. We unloaded the lighter sled, then reloaded it with only a few pounds of freight. As an added help, we harnessed Faust and even old Gyp to help us. I looked at that incline and wondered how we, so weakened by lack of nourishment, would ever reach the top. Rowe shouted, and the sled moved up.

The work was terrible—beyond my wildest imaginations of what hard labor might be. The sled crept up the incline a few feet. We paused, panting, as steam rose from our faces and breath congealed on our clothes. For once, the ill-clad boys were warm—so warm from overexertion in the sixty-below weather, that a constant fog emanated from them like steam from a pile of hot, wet ashes.

“Dig in!” yelled Barry. “It’s only a thousand feet!”

“Let’s leave the stuff here and mush to the IXL with only our tent and grub,” said Monty.

“Leave it and lose it for only a thousand feet? Come on—dig in!”

Only a thousand feet—a distance so short one could cover it in a few minutes in the summer. But now, weakened by hunger, pressed back by the snow and the sharp ascent, and loaded with mining supplies, we could creep forward only a few feet at a time.

I had heard of parties of tenderfeet who had been found frozen in the spring after failing to cross barriers such as this—parties who used well-beaten trails like the Chilkoot Pass, where travelers by the hundred passed constantly. What chance would we have, here in this desolate country?

Days and nights merged together. Our meals left us

more ravenous than before we had eaten. The food supplies dwindled steadily. We became capable of less and less work. If we could have had only one good meal—I determined to hoard the last of the food for a splurge on Christmas Day. We owed ourselves that one good meal.

I could feel by the looseness of my clothes that I was losing much weight. My hands, unused to hard work, burned by the coal-oil explosion, and split by the terrible cold, had become thin, with the veins standing out blue. My face felt tight and bony under its burns.

Up, up, in a series of days and nights which became blurs across the consciousness. The food supplies were so low that we burned the grub box for fuel rather than relay its slight weight up the divide.

Then, when I felt sure we were fighting a hopeless battle, it was suddenly over. The final load reached the top. The valley lay clean and white beneath us.

The wind whipped bitterly up from the other side, and we could not remain idle. Carefully we reloaded the sleds and prepared for the long descent. And now we found that the driving wind had crusted the snow on this side sufficiently to bear our weights. It meant that great care must be taken to let the sleds into the valley without upsetting.

Warily, dragging against the ropes, the boys eased the sleds over the crest. The pull of gravity became too great. In a moment, sleds and men spun downward in a dizzying plunge.

Toward the middle of the slope, the crusted snow thinned out, and the sleds broke through. This stopped them and gave the boys another opportunity to gain control. I sat down on the cold summit of the divide, took Faust into my lap, and pushed off. Down we went, covering in each second the same distance we had fought hours to climb.

We shot past the boys, and they yelled and waved their arms.

At the bottom we struck a drift, shot high into the air, and came down sprawling and spinning on the crusted snow, shaken but unhurt. Faust sailed from my arms and landed in a whirling ball of fur. Gingerly, we rose, and I looked back up the slope. We were safe. The first divide was crossed. I laughed a little.

The boys let the sleds down the incline slowly. I had nothing to do, and the cold bit into me terribly. To keep warm, I selected a likely camping spot, and jumped up and down until the crust of snow broke. I threw out the pieces, then leveled the soft snow for our blankets.

Not until I was in my tent did I recall that this was Christmas Eve. There were no stockings hung out that night, but I determined to cook a Christmas dinner the next day.

This meal was to come as no surprise to the boys. We had looked forward to it for days—had even skimmed on the rations originally agreed upon so the meal would be possible. We felt that we'd need just one good meal to get across the second divide. After that, we could travel on our nerve.

Not much food remained—the three potatoes, the onion, a pinch of flour, the can of meat, the can of tomatoes, and some of Whiskers' hardtack. We had saved enough coffee for six cups.

The boys appointed Monty to help me, and the others left early Christmas morning to prepare a trail up the second divide. Our work could not stop even for Christmas.

We decided to make a mulligan stew, which meant an all-day task, but insured our receiving every last ounce of energy and nourishment from the food. We could put everything in it with nothing wasted.

Monty's task was to keep the fire going, and bring me snow to melt. It was never-ending work. He would hack willows by the armful, then bring them inside and stuff them into the stove. In what seemed like only a few moments, they would flare up, and die. Monty would rush outside to chop more. Between times, he would bring snow for me to melt.

The potatoes and the onion were like rocks and had to be thawed. The meat and tomatoes were solid in the cans. Hours passed before I could hack them open and pry out the contents and melt them in the frying pan. But by now, the pot was filled with melted snow, and we could start preparing the simple meal.

The men returned from their work and sprawled on their blankets. After seven hours, the stew finally came to a boil. I added the pinch of flour to thicken it, let it cook for a time, then divided it evenly in the cups. But it was worth the effort, and there was enough for everyone. Even Faust and Gyp got a taste and licked their chops in appreciation.

By the time the stew was gone, the coffee was boiling. We drank it, black and without cream or sugar, in the same cups which had held the stew. Now nothing remained but a few shreds of hardtack. And a thousand feet of icy slope lay just ahead.

We crept to our blankets and lay back with full stomachs for the first time in many days. The hot food would give us the strength and courage we would need to tackle that second divide. No one said anything—no one talked at all, these days and nights. We seemed unconsciously to be conserving on everything, even our words, for the last big drive which would begin the next day.

In the morning, the relays began again. This time, we fought our way up a crusted incline—icy and without foothold. In the beginning we had chopped holes in the

snow. But as we worked on the slope, the holes broke through and we tumbled into snow to our waists. Many times the sled broke away and plunged to the bottom.

Once more, days and nights stood still, and the steel band at my head tightened, and the cold bit deeper and sharper than ever before. Weakness assailed us after each burst of effort.

But the freight was moving up that slope.

One night when I had returned to the tent a little ahead of the boys, to start a fire and warm the blankets for them, Monty suddenly rushed up to me as I was chopping willows in the gray light.

"I went into an overflow! I think my leg's frozen!"

I couldn't take time to build a fire and thaw out his muckluk, for one leg was sheathed in solid ice and would freeze to the bone if I didn't act quickly. I snatched a knife from the tent, pushed Monty into his blankets, and slashed open the muckluk.

The flesh was white and frozen. I started rubbing it with snow, yelling for the men to come as I worked. But the wind blew against us, and they were far up the divide. I worked on alone.

Just as my arms weakened and hope faded, circulation returned to his leg. I wrapped him in blankets and kindled the fire. The little stove warmed the tent quickly.

Monty's immediate danger had passed, but the future held great peril for him. The muckluk—the one I had slashed—was now unserviceable. And Monty couldn't travel without it.

But he tried to be cheerful in spite of my concern. "Don't let it worry you, Fizzy. We'll all pull through."

I pattered aimlessly about until the other boys returned. We could find no solution to Monty's plight—had nothing with which to stitch up the slashed muckluk. But while we sat helplessly—five tenderfeet faced with a real

problem—Whiskers was quietly busy in his corner. Finally he tossed Monty some strips of canvas which he had torn from the tarpaulin.

“Jest wrap them around the muckluk like a puttee. That’ll carry you through in fine style.”

We stared at the old sourdough in admiration.

Horrible thoughts began to torment me at night. Most persistent was a tale I had heard of a party of men who became lost during a blizzard and ate their dogs to avoid starvation. The story had climaxed with the men finally drawing lots and killing and eating one of their own members.

Sleep was now a long night of mental agony. I fought against the horrible stories that came back to me, but the thoughts went on endlessly, like a tune that can’t be forgotten.

But we continued the fight and inched our way up the side of the second divide. Cold winds blew, and snow hampered our progress, but we were getting there. It was a long, terrorizing nightmare, but at last it ended. The sled brought the tent and the blankets and the stove from the valley. The relays were over.

Rowe said quietly, “We’ll get there all right now.”

There could be no tarrying on the summit of the divide. We had paused only a moment, but already the cold was at work in our bodies. We must keep moving until we had descended into the valley, raised the tent, and built a fire.

I suddenly realized that as I stared into the valley lying darkly below us, I was looking at a tree—a pine tree whose pointed crown stood out plainly against the snow.

“A tree!” I cried.

The boys looked and smiled, and new courage came into their eyes. A tree. Then another. And another. The trees of the Fox river valley.

"God!" breathed Ed reverently. "Now we can be really warm."

We plunged down the divide and camped at the bottom, too worn even to haul the sleds the short distance which lay between us and the scattering of trees. For the last time, we burned willow boughs in the Yukon stove.

In the morning, we washed down the last of the hard-tack with hot water, fed the dogs the remainder of the dog food, then started down the frozen Fox. Now there was nothing to eat—nothing at all.

Whiskers and Gyp broke a trail, and we stumbled and slipped behind them, but the sleds moved slowly ahead. Stops for rest came more frequently.

At last Monty demanded, "Why don't we leave this junk here and strike out without it? We'll never reach camp this way."

Rowe explained quietly, "We've got to have the tent and the stove. And we might as well haul the rest along too. It isn't far now—only seventeen miles."

"Seventeen miles! We'll be dead long before we're even close to camp if we're weighted down with this stuff."

"And we'll die sooner without the tent and the stove. We've got this far. If we leave the equipment here, we'll never find it again. Spring floods'll wash it away. And without it, our whole trip's a failure, for we haven't money to buy any more."

"We can make it," said Ed Ferguson grimly. "We'll finish what we started."

The trees reached out and passed us, but there were always others ahead—not many, just a few sparse pines braving the winds of the Arctic. But they brought new courage to us, made us feel that at last we had found an ally who would give real aid in our fight against a bitter foe.

Again the steel band closed around my forehead, numbing my thoughts and my mind. Stolidly we slogged on. Now the snow lay deeper, made the going harder. Weakness checked us, and we stopped time after time for breath.

At one of these stops, I pushed ahead, intent upon opening the trail just a little farther. Suddenly the surface of the Fox river dropped from under me. Icy water stung me to the knees. I had gone into an overflow.

Quickly, I scrambled back onto the ice. My muckluks and my stockings immediately froze. I thought of Monty and his ruined muckluk. Now if both of mine were gone—

The boys rushed to help me. I saw old Whiskers hurriedly gathering firewood—firewood, not willows, at last. Numbness closed in on my feet.

It was too early to make camp and raise the tent. And my legs would have frozen solid in that time. But the boys held my feet close to the fire Whiskers had built, and the ice started melting away. Then quickly, they snatched me back from the flames, and chipped away the remaining ice. Off came the muckluks and the stockings.

The flesh had turned dead white. Monty, who insisted upon helping me, worked over my feet and legs, rubbing them with snow. I could feel nothing at all.

Monty said, "You pulled me through, Fizzy. I've got to do it for you."

There were almost tears in his eyes.

I muttered, "I'll be all right, Monty."

He rubbed and rubbed. Memories came to me of men whose frozen toes snapped off in their muckluks—of limbs hacked off with an ax. Horrible thoughts grasped me and held me. I felt no sense of despair or regret—rather simply that it was all over—that I had lost.

Monty said, "You're frowning, Fizzy. Does it hurt now?"

I had been so deeply engrossed in defeatism that I hadn't even been aware that Monty was hurting me—that the sense of feeling had returned. Now the pain increased as circulation started—ten thousand needles flowing through my veins, sticking me.

Eld said, taking over from Monty, "You'll be all right now, Fizzy. Don't worry."

They tried to dry out my muckluks and stockings, but precious hours were being wasted, and every hour spent without food meant our arriving that much weaker at the last lap of our trip.

"We'd better move on," I said.

They uttered no false offers of wanting to wait until I was thoroughly dry. Their lives were at stake as well as mine.

"I guess we'll have to," said Rowe.

I nodded.

Barry stripped off a pair of his socks. I pulled them on next to my skin, then drew the damp fur stockings and the muckluks over them. It was the best we could do. The push ahead couldn't be delayed even for frozen feet. An unkind foe pressed too closely behind us.

Hunger passed from being a thing alive—a hand down our throats tearing at the lining of our stomachs—passed into a giddiness and an inertia that lay across our minds and bodies. The past and the future ceased to exist; only the present lived—the deep, deep snow, the bitter cold, the dark sky overhead—these were our world, the world which sought to beat us down.

The combined forces of darkness and exhaustion cut our progress to a crawl. Three miles a day, perhaps two. But we kept moving. Gold lay ahead—gold and food at the IXL camp. And even though death was now a probability for us all, the lure of gold ruled uppermost in our minds. The reward was worth the gamble. Over the hills

ahead lay the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, the goal for which we had traveled seven thousand miles.

Today, tomorrow and until midnight of the next day remained for us to reach those claims and post our relocation notices. We never doubted that those claims held gold—the word was synonymous with any claim in Alaska. Gold was coming from the ground all around those claims—Ophir creek to the north, Basin creek, Bear river, Dutch creek. And though Rowe was incompetent as a leader, he had lived and mined in Alaska before; he knew gold. He had seen the claims and panned them and tested them. And the gold was there.

We were a long time getting the fever from our blood. Neither cold nor snow nor hunger nor weariness could drive it from us. Bitter days and weeks and months would pass before we would realize that gold seldom lay about, waiting for the passerby to gather it. Some of us never realized this; some of us are still in Alaska, looking. And some of us are buried there.

Our clothes had not been from our bodies since we left Nome over a month before. We teemed with vermin. We were dirty, hungry, cold, exhausted. But nothing could stop us now—not even death itself. Perhaps we might die inside before we reached the claims, but our bodies would live and carry us to our destination.

Now we had real wood in the stove—a fire which would hold through the night, and drive out some of the chill which dwelt within us. It inspired new courage, that snapping and crackling of spruce boughs in the Yukon stove.

Monty and I dried our muckluks thoroughly. I gave Barry back his socks. Our lives would be just a little less miserable now—our feet not both cold and wet.

Barry said weakly, "If we only had something to eat—even a cup of coffee."

The athlete, accustomed to quantities of good food, felt our predicament most. Ed and I, both small and underweight, seemed to suffer the least.

Monty repeated, "A cup of coffee."

It was a prayer, not the simple repetition of common English words.

Everyone sat quietly for a moment. Someone opened the door of the stove and threw in wood. Flames tossed red rays against the canvas walls. The faces of the men were without expression. They stared lackluster into the fire. The door remained open a few minutes, at risk of killing the fire.

The old sourdough cleared his throat tentatively and looked into the ring of faces in the firelight.

"I suppose we can eat the dogs if we gotta." He paused and gulped and averted his eyes.

My heart leaped. Poor Faust. He had come with me not because he wished, but because I had selfishly brought him. He had followed me through it all, never complaining, never causing trouble. And now he was the smallest, the weakest, the least useful of us. He would go first.

I looked at the men—looked into those faces which were having trouble straightening out the old sourdough's words—difficult words concerning a difficult task. Whiskers' fingers sought the tender spot behind his dog's ear, and the dog looked up and grinned and thumped his bushy tail appreciatively.

"We can start on Gyp if you say." This time the tail thumped harder in response to the name. Whiskers' eyes glistened. He cleared the tightness from his throat. "He's gettin' purty old—ain't much good no more anyway."

I caught my lower lip between my teeth and looked down at the blankets. The breaths of the men rasped sharply in the closeness of the little tent. Gyp's tail stilled and he stretched out trustingly by his master.

It was too much.

Rowe growled fiercely, "We'll get through all right, oldtimer. And it won't be by eating your dog."

The boys muttered savage assent. Whiskers started to speak, choked, then simply nodded his head and continued caressing the dog gently. . . . This, then, was the dirty, lousy, repulsive old sourdough whom I had resented.

In shame, I turned away and scrubbed the wetness from my eyes.

Now the days and nights were no longer separate divisions of time, one of light and one of dark. Instead they formed a whole, one portion indistinguishable from the other, and hovered constantly above us—an enemy which rushed upon us and beset us and goaded us and left us weary and exhausted. Millions of seconds joined forces and became a whole—an endless blend—which drove us on, fought against us, tangled our feet, gnawed at our brains in our terrible race against time.

The weakness of hunger and overexertion threw us to our knees, pressed against us when we sought to rise. The cold hung bags of lead on our eyelids, stilled the flow of the chill blood, conspired with time to defeat us. But we pushed on, hesitating now almost not at all, ignoring the cries of our bodies to cease, the aching of muscles, the pounding of hearts, the straining of lungs, and were thankful for the weakness which numbed us until we swayed giddily and weren't quite conscious of night and day and hunger and motion.

We put up the tent, tore down the tent, loaded the sleds, unloaded the sleds, pushed them, pulled them, clung to them, somehow kept them inching through the deep snow. Slowly, ever so slowly, inch by inch, foot by foot, mile by mile, we fought down and bested the over-

whelming forces of weariness and hunger and snow and cold which lived always within us and without.

"Why can't we leave the sleds now—take the tent on our backs?"

"We'd die without the stove."

"Carry that too."

"We haven't the strength. It'd be harder work than pulling the sleds."

"How much farther?"

"Only a few more miles. We'll make it."

"Only a few more miles— But we can't drag these sleds any farther. My feet haven't any feeling left."

"How do we know we're on the right trail?"

"God, if we're off the trail—"

"If I could only sit down for a minute and rest—"

"Let's stop and rest awhile. Just for a minute. We don't need to put up the tent."

Up went the tent. Down came the tent. Into the snow. Shoving, pulling, tugging, straining. Another mile won.

"Four miles today? Did we make that much, honest?"

"I'm hungry."

"Eat some snow."

That was it. . . . Eat some snow. Eat some bark from the trees. Eat some of those little willows. They won't hurt you, and they might do some good. Lots of animals eat bark—and you're only an animal now, an animal hunted by time and the elements.

For a few moments, the fog parted from my mind. I realized that we must have reached the point on the Fox river where Whiskers and Gyp were to turn off for Council City.

There was no time for farewells, no sense in useless words. Whiskers raised an arm, then swung onto the frozen, snow-deep tundra.

"So long."

That was all. Maybe he'd reach Council, maybe not. He had faced this sort of thing before. He'd face it again—if he lived. There he went, cold and hungry and numb, without food or shelter. . . . Seven deep, bitter miles to go. Whiskers and his dog.

Our forward plunge started again. Daylight faded. It was tonight or never, for I knew that physically I was done. If I went to sleep without food again, I wouldn't get up in the morning.

The darkness became complete. We plowed through the deep snow, searching for a light. Miles passed. No light. No sound. Only wind and snow and sparse, brave trees in a barren land.

Hours slipped away. No light gleamed suddenly through the trees; no odor reached us of a friendly fire. Hitch Hatch was not at the IXL. We had missed his deserted camp in the darkness. Now we were lost. Nothing on earth could save us.

Then suddenly we were there, standing unbelievably before a dark tent-house. No smoke spired above the roof; no light brightened the canvas walls.

Simultaneously we broke from the sleds and stumbled to the entrance. Rowe struck a match, held it high.

"God, oh, God—it's empty!"

He moved into the tent, stepped to the rear wall looming vague in the semi-darkness. We crowded close around him, our breaths rising white in the glow of the curling flame. Then we saw it—the food cache.

"Beans!"

"Beans and flour!"

Food for cold and hungry people.

Chapter Eight

WE LAY about the tent for an hour, stiff and sore and weary, but no longer cold or hungry. Then Rowe looked at his watch, and got to his feet painfully.

"We'd better get started. Those claims have to be restaked right after midnight."

I had almost forgotten that this was New Year's Eve—that Rowe's claims around the IXL would expire for lack of assessment work at midnight and would have to be restaked under other names immediately after that time lest someone else stake them.

Barry muttered, "Let 'em wait till morning."

"They'll have to be staked tonight."

"All the claims in Alaska couldn't get me up now."

Rowe looked at me helplessly.

I said, "We went through all that hardship just to be here in time. I'd hate to think we suffered so much for nothing."

"Gee, Fizzy, I can't move a step."

Monty added, "My body's so stiff and that hot bread and beans made me so tired—" His voice trailed off in a

yawn, which changed to a groan as he moved himself. I knew how he felt. My body, too, felt as if it had been flayed with switches.

"I'm just as tired as the rest of you. So is Rowe. But if you won't help him, I'll have to do it myself. He's got to have witnesses."

Ed, who had lain back quietly, now rose. "I'll go."

Shame-faced, grumbling and half angry, the other boys struggled to their feet, and started pulling their coats about them. I stifled my sympathy and said nothing.

Barry rumbled, "I don't see what all the rush is about. Morning would have done just as well."

"Not if somebody else got there and staked the claims first," said Rowe.

Sadly, the boys pushed from the warmth of the tent. But all the same, I felt justified in having shamed them into accompanying Rowe. I couldn't have left that tent without Rowe's half carrying me!

The work took only an hour—consisted merely of attaching the relocation notices to the original stakes. Rowe divided the notices among them, and all acted as witnesses for each other. Now our gold was secure—would be doubly so when we filed the claims in Council City. The thought never occurred to any of us that the ground might not hold gold in sufficient quantities to mine. We were to learn all about that later.

When the boys returned, we ate another meal of beans and bread, then crawled into our blankets with the intention of sleeping the clock around.

We woke to a chattering of ptarmigan outside the tent. I looked out at them—half a dozen birds whose plumage matched the snow in winter, the tundra in summer. My mouth watered. Months had passed since I last tasted fresh meat.

Ed muttered something about his lost rifle.

"Cheer up," said Rowe, struggling from his blankets. "We'll all be eating pheasant breast at this time next year."

Monty had wakened cranky.

"When'd they start serving pheasant breast in the poor house?" he growled.

He still suffered terribly from his frozen leg and face. Strangely, I now felt almost no after effects from mine.

We had breakfast of beans and bread, and made coffee of burnt bread crumbs boiled in water. Rowe decided to take Monty with him to Roweburg, where his frozen face and leg would receive better attention.

"I'll come back the next day with food," added Rowe.

I felt too exhausted to make the trip, and decided to remain at the IXL with Barry and Ed. We could putter around the claims and in this manner apply thirty dollars a day toward the assessment work for 1901.

Voices reached us suddenly from outside the tent. Rowe looked up in amazement.

"What in the—" His voice trailed off as we looked at each other in astonishment.

The tent flap parted, and several of the boys from Roweburg looked in—Wheedon, Pratt, Woody, others. Each was a member of the outside faction whom Rowe had said were becoming troublesome.

They filed into the crowded tent and sat uneasily on the blankets. The small space became cramped and hot and strained.

Rowe asked, "How do you happen to be way over here?"

Pratt laughed nervously. "Everybody was pretty worried about you. We just thought we'd wander around and see if we could find you."

"People don't just wander around in this country," observed Rowe mildly, adding, "at least not this far."

The men eyed each other uncomfortably and tried to make conversation. I remembered the task Rowe had assigned me and tried to chirp brightly. But the effort failed, and the outsiders finally went from the tent on the excuse that they were getting too warm.

Rowe looked at us. "You know what this means," he said in a low whisper.

Barry growled, "What's the matter with those fellows? They didn't act very glad to see us."

Rowe laughed softly. "You wouldn't be glad to see them either if they'd just done you out of fifty or a hundred thousand dollars."

"I don't get it."

"They came over here to jump those claims we staked last night."

Rowe relieved the outsiders of their supplies—a small amount of beans, flour, bacon and coffee, which he left for Barry and Ed and me—then with Monty accompanied them back to Roweburg.

I melted snow and soon had coffee boiling and bacon snapping on the stove. Delmonico's never served a breakfast like that.

Since we had picked up the old sourdough, each of us had done his share of scratching. It would be impossible to rid ourselves entirely of the vermin until we reached Roweburg and could boil our clothing and blankets. But we decided to do what we could about them now. We would be unable to remove our clothes until we reached Roweburg. But we felt that if we could clean out the blankets, our nights, at least, would be a little more comfortable.

We left the blankets outside in fifty below weather all day, then shook them and brushed them as best we could with our hands. Ed inspected them for vermin.

"We didn't shake them all out by a long sight," he

said, "but they're hard as bullets—frozen solid. If we could only do that with our clothes!"

When we got in the tent, I picked several specimens from the blankets and put them in a small vial I carried for gold samples. In a few minutes, the warm air heated the glass. We threw up our hands in resignation. The frozen bullets had come to life.

"You can't win," said Ed wearily.

The boys made the motions of working and I earned my ten dollars a day toward the assessment work by cooking for them. On the third day, Rowe returned with supplies. For the first time in almost two months we had a real meal—milk, butter, sugar, stewed fruit, and a loaf of leavened bread which Mrs. Rowe had baked for us.

During the years I knew her, how that woman worked! Never once did I hear her complain—not even when, later in Nome, she was cooking three meals daily for thirty to forty men working on the Irene creek claims.

Many times I have seen her cook three or four hundred doughnuts, dozens of loaves of bread, great kettles of stew, working without pause from morning till night. As a rule, Rowe did nothing. Somehow he always arranged so that someone else would do the work and he would tell them how. And he usually told them the wrong thing.

From the beginning, our company knew almost constant poverty; yet thousands upon thousands of dollars were squandered needlessly. Rowe never had anything to show for it. If he had been a drinking man or a gambler, it might have been more explainable. But during the rare moments when the company had money, Rowe did everything possible to get rid of it at once. And he always succeeded.

Rowe's purchase of the two boats—the *Fizzy* and the *Flyer*—was a minor example of his erratic, headlong

dred and seventy-five dollars for the two boats, when one of the small coastal steamers would have freighted the supplies in eight or ten hours for about a hundred dollars. Consequently, the entire summer had been wasted while the boys relayed the equipment to Roweburg. One of the boats was lost in the flood, and the other was uselessly on our hands at Roweburg. And when he bought the boats, our finances were at a low ebb. He justified himself by stating that he had depended upon money from the outside to reach us that fall. But that was Rowe—always banking on some uncertainty, then shifting the blame when his plans fell through.

We remained at the IXL camp until the eleventh of January, and completed the assessment work for that year. Then, with fair weather, an easy trail, and strength in our bodies, we pushed quickly to Roweburg.

I had lain in my blankets many nights and thought comfortingly of the cozy little cabin I was to have all to myself when we reached Roweburg. But there another disappointment awaited me. Each of the single cabins was far from completed. None of them even had a roof.

I stormed at Rowe, who had waited until the last moment to tell me. "You promised me a cabin would be ready when we got here."

The dreamer's face twisted into a tired, hurt smile.

"They promised they'd have them done. It isn't my fault they split from the party and wouldn't work."

"It shouldn't take long to get one ready."

He shrugged. "We can't do a thing till spring. Old Man Dow's laid up with rheumatism again and can't do it alone. The lumber has to be whipsawed."

That meant each log would have to be placed on an overhead sawhorse, while one man stood on the log and another stood below and whipsawed each slab of lumber from the log. It would take all winter. And no finished

lumber could be obtained till spring. I checked it off as just another promise of Rowe's that had gone wrong.

Rowe said, "You'll be comfortable till your cabin's ready. There's plenty of room in the big cabin. You can have the bunk above Mrs. Rowe and me."

"What about Ed and Barry and Monty?"

"Monty's moved into the big tent with his brothers. Ed and Barry can sleep in the loft with Old Man Dow."

"But there's room for them in one of the other bunks. They've slept on floors and ground and snow long enough."

Again Rowe shrugged, helplessly this time. "Pop Charles has one bunk, Uncle Howard the other. They're old men and can't adapt themselves like the younger ones. Ed and Barry 'll be all right in the loft."

That night I sat at a real table in a warm room and ate a properly cooked meal. And, best of all, I could wash my hands and face in warm water again, and shampoo my hair and boil my clothes and my blankets. I felt that my hands would never be nice again. They were chapped, lined, worn, deeply etched with grease and dirt. And pitifully thin. During the fifty-two day trip, I had lost at least thirty pounds and now could not have weighed more than seventy-five or seventy-six.

After supper, I climbed to the upper bunk and lay back and looked at the rafters—wallowed in the warmth and luxury of clean blankets and clean clothes and a wooden cabin and a bunk. I fell asleep feeling very smug and satisfied with myself.

But in the morning my smug content was gone, and something painful had taken its place. During the night I had wakened times innumerable. Now my back was broken, and my shoulders and legs had been pounded with a heavy club. Every time I moved, sharp twinges of

gain nipped me. Oh, for the soft comforts of the trail! Oh, for a bed of willow boughs in the snow!

My bunk was made of a wooden framework and spruce poles laid endwise. The poles rested on the head and tail pieces, and served alone as a mattress. I had spread my blankets on them. Their hardness had done the rest.

As I climbed stiffly down from the bunk, I thought of the deep, soft feather bed Spaulding had given me. A long time would pass before I'd sleep on that feather bed again—so much time that when the long-dreamed-of night arrived, I would again suffer aches and pains and stiffness, this time because my body had become accustomed to the spruce poles and found the feather bed too soft!

The cabin had been built in the form of an ell, and contained a range and a heating stove in one wing, and the two double-decker bunks in the other. Sprawled about between these furnishings were miscellaneous benches, boxes, heaped supplies and tables. There was little room to move around.

But the cabin was well chinked and comfortable. There was no glass in the windows, but these had been covered with skins, which let in only a little light. Lanterns burned all the time, and I blessed the light which was again ours after night fell.

Roweburg consisted of our big cabin, several unfinished smaller cabins, a large old tent, a small tent for dogs, a grub tent and an old cabin of Hitch Hatch's which was not used, but which yielded a mite of food when starvation again rapped at our door.

The outsiders, as we designated the boys who split from our faction, lived in the large old tent, but had their meals in the cabin. Pratt, the Maine baker, had been signed on primarily to cook for the company. Yet he did no cooking or baking at all; the task fell entirely upon

little Mrs. Rowe, who offered no objections or complaints. Out of sheer pity and to have something to do, I pitched in and helped her after I reached Roweburg.

The dog tent was another minor example of Rowe's inconsistency. Though we were too poor to buy or support sled dogs, he had bought a tent for the nonexistent creatures! Faust, who was a well-mannered little fellow and thoroughly housebroke, slept on the floor below my bunk. Later, when the food began running short and we went on rations, the outsiders complained, rightly perhaps, that the food my dog ate should have been reserved for them. After that, I gave Faust a portion of my food.

The cabin offered little room for us to move about. Yet the bitter cold forced us to remain indoors much of the time. Most of the men became so lazy or discouraged that they got out of bed only for their meals. Some of them slept every hour between mealtimes. I found myself envying anyone so constituted.

Outside, the snow lay nine feet deep. Trenches had been dug by Cecil and Rally Marks, two of the boys who had not succumbed to ennui. These trenches led only to the unfinished cabins, the tents, and the water hole in the Fox river, and constituted our entire range of outside activity for many weeks.

The ell cabin measured 24x14 in each wing. Above the crowded sleeping quarters was the loft, where Ed, Barry and Old Man Dow slept. Dow's rheumatism now kept him in continual agony. Almost nightly he treated us to rare outbursts, some of which may creep into this narrative from time to time. Dow, suffering as he was, served as our comic relief.

I started trying to bring peace and unity to the camp. All of the outsiders, to whom Monty, Rally and Cecil had now been won, resented Rowe greatly. Later on, a fist fight broke out between Rowe and Wheedon over a bottle

of catchup. I had found the bottle deep in our supplies. There was only a little in it—not enough to serve everyone in the camp. So I elected to save it for those of us who occupied the cabin. The food had dwindled and we were living mostly on beans. The outsiders had eaten their meal and left. We sat down and were just using the catchup, when Wheedon returned for some reason and accused Rowe of holding out the good food. A terrible fight broke out, but the other boys simply encircled them and started whistling and stamping their feet in time. This started the gladiators laughing, and the battle stopped. I explained to Wheedon, and the incident was forgotten.

Monty, Cecil and Rally helped me in my attempt to win the outsiders back from their aversive attitude, and in the end I did manage to act as a go-between for the two factions, and the friction for a time was not so exposed. But the outsiders' seeming acceptance of Rowe's leadership lay only on the surface. Rebellion broke out again later on, and in our hearts Ed and Barry and I could not rightly blame the boys. Rowe was incompetent. His schemes and plans and daydreams kept disaster hovering nearby for months.

The day after we reached Roweburg, Rowe hurried into the cabin, crying, "I know what caused the split now." He sat on a box and opened his coat. "Remember that young fellow at Solomon—the one with the team who wouldn't come with us because we were taking the summer trail?"

I nodded. The fading figure of the young man against the white beach was one I'd long remember.

"Well, he was a liar and a natural-born troublemaker. He was mad because we wouldn't take the winter trail and give him safety in numbers. When he got here, he told everybody we'd been spending all the money on a

high old time in Nome—that we were living big at hotels and taking in the night life. He said that when we got ready to leave for Roweburg, we bought expensive furs for ourselves and nothing for the boys here in camp—not even supplies or equipment or tobacco.”

I felt my face darkening in anger. Living big at hotels! Night life! The only night life we knew was a wintry wind sweeping across an icy tent.

Rowe continued. “He didn’t say a word about those two sledsful we were hauling by hand. All he told them was that we were coming in over the summer trail, and all the old-timers said we’d never make it. That was why the boys came over to the IXL to jump those claims. They thought we were dead.”

“And they said they were out looking for us!”

“Well, they were, in a way. This young fellow stirred up so much unrest here that Mrs. Rowe had to order him from camp. Just a natural-born liar—one of those people who’ll lie just to attract attention. Mrs. Rowe got to thinking about what he’d said and since we were so long overdue she went over to Council and saw the commissioner and tried to get an Eskimo and dogs to look for us. I guess the Eskimo either didn’t look at all, or didn’t try very hard.”

I shook my head. “If there were only a telephone running from Nome to Council— Just think of all the unnecessary trips that could be saved. Lots of people’s lives would be saved, too, when they could simply telephone instead of making that long trip.”

Rowe’s eyes lighted.

“You may have something there, Fizzy.”

With the misunderstanding over our absence straightened out, the strain between the two factions eased at once—not entirely, however, for the men’s resentment dated from before our trip. I knew that most of the out-

siders planned to leave Rowe as soon as the trails permitted. The company would never come entirely together again. And though I was trying to effect such a condition I knew in my heart that even my fortunes lay elsewhere, once my contract with Rowe expired.

One of our first tasks was to take stock of the remaining provisions. The flood had taken heavy toll and left the supplies in a badly unbalanced condition. Now we had only two cans of evaporated potatoes, a five-pound can of evaporated onions, which were spoiled when we later opened them, a few cans of canned milk, and small quantities of sugar, coffee, white flour, bacon and butter. On the other hand, we had huge supplies of white beans, cornmeal and salt, but only a nominal amount of tea, whole wheat flour, and baking powder. We knew that unless we raised money for additional supplies, everything but the beans, cornmeal and salt would be gone long before the break-up. In addition, we had only one can of coal oil, which would last only a short time, and then we would return to living in darkness, as we had on the fifty-two-day trip.

Rowe refused to become concerned over our plight.

"Lyman and Lang are sending that money in over the ice. It should be here in a month or so, and we'll pull through till then without any trouble."

"If Lyman and Lang actually send it," Ed drawled.

At this moment, the U. S. Deputy Marshal from Council City stepped into the cabin and nodded grimly at Rowe.

"You're under arrest," he announced. "I'm taking you with me."

Rowe's mouth dropped open. "What for—what have I—"

"You'll get it good this time. The people are mad."

"But why—"

"You weren't satisfied when we raised money to get you and your company out of the country last year. You had to come back without money or proper equipment, then take a young lady over a trail that even an Eskimo woman's never traveled before in winter. Now we've heard that the young lady died on the trail."

Rowe found his tongue and stammered, "Why, she's all right—didn't die. That's her right there. Miss Fitz." His words trailed off as he pointed at me.

The marshal asked, "Are you the young lady who left Nome with Rowe and his party?"

I identified myself.

He turned back to Rowe. "I'm glad to hear she's alive, but the fact she got through all right makes little difference. You risked her life, and we're fed up with your bringing people like this into this country, then expecting us to care for them when your money gives out. I'll have to take you back with me."

Rowe wet his lips. Mrs. Rowe's eyes appealed to me. There was only one thing to do.

I said, "But this is silly. Mr. Rowe didn't want me to come here with them. He refused to take me—wanted me to stay in Nome—but I trailed along behind them, and then there wasn't anything else he could do."

I paused and tried to look truthful after the lie—a white lie which I've never regretted telling for Rowe's fine, hard-working, loyal wife.

The marshal hesitated, doubting my story. But my tale cleared Rowe, and the officer left.

Everyone was silently thoughtful for a moment. Then I asked, "What's this about your last company being stranded here?"

He looked at me tiredly. "I couldn't help it. My backers in New York didn't live up to their promises. Money and supplies were supposed to come in on the last boat; when

they failed to arrive, the people in Council had to help us."

It explained why none of his previous company, aside from Uncle Howard, had returned to Alaska with Rowe—why Rowe owned claims in which members of the old companies would have an interest if their contracts hadn't been canceled. These conditions had often caused me wonder. And now they were cleared up.

Ed said quietly, "The same thing's liable to happen to us now, isn't it, Rowe?"

"Not a chance. I have new backers. They won't let me down."

"What would have happened to us if Fizzy hadn't worked all summer and earned that money?"

"We'd have got by all right. I'd have made other arrangements."

I looked away in disgust.

Ed asked, "What will you do if the money doesn't come across the ice from Lyman and Lang?"

Rowe angered. "I don't want to hear any more about this. The money will be here from Lyman and Lang. But if it doesn't come, I have other means of taking care of us."

Ed was silent for a moment. Then he rumbled, "If you're figuring on the people of Council taking care of you again, you're crazy."

We dropped the matter from open discussion. There was nothing to do except hope that Lyman and Lang would keep their word.

The days dragged by slowly and monotonously. We puttered about the cabin, cleaned the trails to the tents and the water hole after storms swept the district. Occasionally some of the boys hiked the twelve miles to Council, where they became acquainted with the people who were wintering inside. Here they learned more of Rowe

—more of the contempt in which he was held by the Alaskans.

The time arrived when the mail from Lyman and Lang was due across the ice. Our provisions kept dwindling, and someone would have to go on foot to Nome to get this money and replenish our supplies.

Rowe said confidentially, "I can't get that telephone out of my mind. If there was a line running from Nome to Council, I could phone the post office in Nome and tell them to send the mail out by the next dog team. The time and trouble it would save!"

"You'd better think about whoever's going to Nome. It will be a hard trip without dogs."

Barry said, "Oh, it won't be so bad. I'll take it."

Rowe okayed the offer. The trip would be dangerous—almost a hundred miles—and Barry would have to walk the entire distance. But there was one consolation. He would not encounter the dangers we went through on the summer trail. Barry would follow a well-traveled trail down to Topkok, then would take the beach trail into Nome. There would be many travelers along the way, with frequent stopping points.

We packed food for Barry, gave him what money we could spare from the company treasury, and wished him luck and good speed. He promised to return immediately.

"Hire a dog team to bring you back with the supplies if there's enough money," said Rowe.

And Barry was gone—a lone traveler on foot in all that cold and snow and wilderness.

A few days later, a passing traveler brought some of my belongings from Nome—a dress or two, my banjo, and other incidentals which I wouldn't need. My typewriter, my stenographic supplies, my feather bed, my trunk—all remained stored in the man's house in Nome.

And Rowe had promised that they would come to me by the first dog team.

In February, five of the boys from Council City came down to Roweburg to repay the visits some of our boys had made them. They stayed a week, and brought their own food, with a lot left over for us.

Two of the boys, Arthur Fox and Jimmy James, were musically inclined, and had brought their instruments with them—a mandolin which James played, and Fox's banjo. They were a constant delight, and broke the dull monotony which had held us. We danced and sang to the music of the two instruments.

We had not yet paid the U. S. Recorder in Council for filing the claims which we had restaked at the IXL. Our money was nearly gone—all but a few cents—and there seemed no possibility of paying the filing bill of twenty-five dollars before Barry returned with the money from Lyman and Lang. But I managed to work out an arrangement with Fox, lest we lose the claims.

His banjo was in poor condition and played miserably. Fox had no money at the present, but he agreed to buy my banjo—the one on which I had been soloist with Victor Herbert's orchestra—for sixty dollars. The U. S. Commissioner, Walter Ferguson (no relation to Ed Ferguson), was a friend of Fox and would accept our location notices and charge the filing fee to Fox, who would pay it later. The remaining thirty-five dollars was to be paid to me sometime before the break-up, when Fox expected money.

The singing and dancing temporarily dispelled the gloom which had hung over the camp. Everyone was singing two of my brother's songs—"I Miss You, Lize" and "My Dolly's Lullaby."

Fox gave me my first ride in a dog sled; he had a beau-

tiful five-dog team, which, incidentally, made our dog tent of some use for once. We went up the Niukluk river about four miles to a roadhouse operated by a dumpy woman called Niukluk Hannah. There had been some rumors that she was selling liquor and that Old Man Dow made occasional trips up there. He had set off on the river trail occasionally, but denied vehemently that he was visiting Hannah. The presence of liquor on his breath he accounted for by pointing to several bottles which Cecil had bought him some time before in Council. The bottles had now dwindled down to one. Dow used them to ease his rheumatic pains, which was as good an excuse as any other.

We didn't go into the woman's roadhouse, but turned around and came back to Roweburg. The temperature was about fifty below, and I found my cheek frosted.

In the dog team were Timid and Tatters, a pair of huskies who had worked out an elaborate system of stealing food. Timid was the ballyhoo man, Tatters the actual thief. Timid would come into a cabin and attract attention by going through a repertoire of tricks—rolling over, staggering as though drunk, yelping, howling, sitting up, and playing dead—all without command. While everyone was occupied watching him, his partner stole the food.

Timid went through his routine while we looked on and howled. Then Tatters barked outside the door. This was the signal, but the boys from Council expected it. Nevertheless the dogs made good their steal. The boys dashed for the door, but Timid shot out between their legs and joined his pal. They raced off down the trails. Between them, they made away with half of a ham which the boys had brought for us, and which Tatters had stolen from the grub tent while his partner in crime entertained us. The dogs were famous throughout the Nome district.

Our visitors left with the promise to call for us with their

dog team before long, and take us to a dance and entertainment which they would arrange in Council. We returned to our humdrum existence, buoyed somewhat by their promise of further diversion ahead.

We rose in the morning, stumbled about the cabin, ate three meals, then went to bed. There was nothing to read, nothing at all to do outside the mechanics of simply remaining alive. The weather was so cold that one day after I had washed my hair, and thought it long since dry, I stepped outside for only a moment. Immediately my hair shot out in the wind and froze solid. I went back into the cabin; the hair dropped. I went out again; it froze. It was funny. I must have looked like a Zulu. And that was all right. Most of the time I felt like one too.

The oil in the can sank lower and lower with no word from Barry. At last there was no oil left. Rowe had some candles, but they lasted only a few nights. Then we were entirely without light. The skin windows permitted a small degree of light during the day, but the nights lasted eighteen hours.

Ed prowled through Hitch Hatch's old cabin and found some grease. We melted it and poured some of it into some small jars which had contained beef extract. Strips of rag served as wicks. We had light again—light of a sort, which had to be conserved rigidly.

Our plight became more intolerable with each day. The food supplies shrank to almost nothing but flour, beans, cornmeal, and the can of evaporated onions, which we had not yet learned were spoiled, and now saved for a gala occasion. We ate beans morning, noon and night. Mrs. Rowe and I tried to vary the menu with cornstarch pudding, but we had no canned milk, and the pudding was thin and unappetizing without butterfat. The last of the coffee was gone. Now once again we made coffee of burnt bread boiled in water.

Tempers grew shorter. The fight broke out over the bottle of catchup. The outsiders threatened to leave the camp en masse, to abandon Rowe's dream of empire. We prevailed upon them to stay just a little longer. Barry would return with money. There would be plenty of food and tobacco for everyone.

Stomachs balked at the continuous diet of beans and cornmeal. We clung to the cabin day and night, imprisoned by the bitter cold. We got in each other's way—acquired sudden hatreds. Ed wouldn't speak to Cecil, a condition which almost cost my life. Dow had put some liniment in my little box which served as a cabinet. I had some cough medicine in there. In the darkness, I drank the liniment. It was poison—had to be got up at once. Cecil had apho morphine, Ed had the needle. They argued over who would administer it while I writhed in agony on the table in the light of the guttering makeshift lamps. At last, they effected a truce, and the drug brought the contents from my stomach, lining and all. Into this stomach I had either to continue putting beans and cornmeal or starve. I went through the agony of eating, but wondered if it wouldn't have been much simpler and less painful to starve.

Every few minutes, someone would step to the door, let in a blast of cold, and peer down the trail for a sign of Barry.

"Not there. Where can he be?"

"What if he's frozen someplace under the snow?"

The thought became terrifying.

Chapter Nine

DICK, the horse Spaulding gave me, had been idling around Roweburg since the freeze-up. Mrs. Rowe told me that the outsiders had wanted to sell Dick in Council City for dog feed. They could have got about twenty-five dollars for him, which they intended using for tobacco. That was their appreciation for my lending them the horse, so that they might be spared some of the heavy work.

Mrs. Rowe had taken my part and refused to let them sell my property without my permission, even though she realized that Dick would be a distinct liability during the winter months. There was little to feed him in Roweburg, and nothing in which he could be stabled, but she felt that I was entitled at least to the chance of trying to carry him through. She knew that in the spring Dick would more than offset whatever trouble and expense he brought the camp during the winter. My horse wasn't going up in tobacco smoke if she could do anything about it!

At the time I accepted the horse from Spaulding, I hadn't known that the cost of feeding him properly

through the months ahead would be terrific. Hay cost three hundred dollars a ton in Council City, but at the time I lent the horse to Rowe, I had no inkling the animal wouldn't be returned to me in Nome.

We could buy no hay for Dick, but we worked out a plan which we hoped would carry the horse through the winter. There was an enormous surplus of cornmeal—much more than we would eat in three winters, let alone one—another example of Rowe's managerial abilities. Rowe agreed to let Dick have nine quarts of cornmeal daily, with spruce boughs for roughage. This mixture we pieced out with anything left over from the kitchen. Dick loved his strange diet.

But he was always ravenous, and caused no little trouble and commotion with his appetite. He would eat almost anything he could get into his mouth. Before I reached Roweburg, he had got into the grub tent and eaten twenty-five pounds of dried apples as well as nearly the entire supply of raisins. Once I found him placidly chewing a box of tacks.

At another time, a visiting Eskimo, to whom a horse was the eighth wonder of the world, rushed into the cabin and yelled that Dick was bleeding to death and his tongue was dragging in the snow. I rushed outside and found Dick clumping slowly about in the trail, with what were apparently splotches of blood underfoot and a long red tongue hanging from his mouth. Closer inspection revealed that he had eaten a red sash from a dress of mine hanging outside. Unbelievable as it sounds, I grasped the end of the sash and slowly unraveled several yards from his stomach.

In his search for more food, Dick became a constant nuisance, but a continual source of amusement. Even the dogs of passing travelers suffered because of Dick. Earlier in the winter someone had stopped for the night, but

instead of putting his dogs in the dog-tent, had left them to bury themselves in the snow, as many travelers did. The man made the mistake of giving his dogs too much food. They ate what they wanted, then buried the rest in the snow, curled themselves into a ball over it, stuck their noses into their tails, and slept on it. Sometime during the night, Dick smelled the food, traced it to its source, and nosed the dogs off, one by one. Now any visitor's dogs were constantly awakened by Dick nudging them in his quest for food.

Nothing was safe from Dick. One night the washtub started banging against the building outside. We awoke, mystified, for the night was calm and breathless. Finally one of the boys got up and investigated. Someone had hidden some food behind the hanging washtub. Dick had smelled it out and was now eating it.

Dick was confined to the narrow trenches which served as trails. His world, since the deep snow, became bounded on one side by the water hole, on the other by the big cabin. At night, when the temperature would zoom down to forty or fifty below, poor Dick would race up and down these trails, snorting and puffing with each step, in an effort to keep warm. The trails passed close to the cabin; consequently, Dick's noise kept us awake.

At this time, Old Man Dow's rheumatism was bothering him particularly, and he became more irritable and cranky than usual. Any interference with his rest brought an explosion.

All would be quiet after he had gone to bed. Then Dick would start. Down the trail he'd pound, blowing and snorting. Back he'd come, sounding like a herd of angry buffalo.

Dow would yell down from the loft, "Plague take that dratted horse! If I ever get down from here alive, I'll kill—oh, oh, my rheumatism, my rheumatism!"

Ed would whisper hoarsely, "Pipe down, Fred. You'll have everybody awake."

"I can't help it. They can't sleep with that horse— Ow! I'm dying! I'll be dead by morning!"

"Dow, for God's sake, pipe down!"

"It's killing me! I can't stand it! . . ." A long string of stirring oaths. "— that cursed horse! The devil take the ugly son. He's got the face of the devil and the heart of—oh, my rheumatism!"

"Maybe a drink'll fix you up, Dow."

A low moan, then the whispered admission, "A drink might come in handy now."

After that, quiet would prevail for a minute or an hour. Then Dick would get cold again and the whole procedure would be enacted all over. At last the whiskey ran out, and we had to do something. Dow was even worse than the horse, once the old man got started.

Ed and Monty and I decided to make Dick some sort of stall. We set to work with what little material we had.

There was no lumber, so one of the tarpaulins would have to do. After several hours' hard work, we managed to set a spruce pole in the frozen ground about ten feet out from the ell of the main cabin. We then ran spruce poles from the roof of the cabin to the pole, making a framework on two sides, and using the walls of the cabin as sides of the stall on the others. We nailed the canvas to the ell, bent it around the pole, nailed it to the framework on top, and nailed it to the other wing of the cabin. Monty cut spruce boughs, which served as a roof and a floor. Part of the canvas hung loose so the horse could come and go at will.

We led him into his new home, fed him, then took him in and out several times to accustom him to his "swinging door." He seemed perfectly content. During the short

afternoon, he passed in and out of the stall as though he had been living in it since birth.

Ed said, "Well, that's that. We'll get some sleep now."

That night, all was quiet, and I lay between sleep and wakefulness, thankful not only that we should now have quiet during the night but also because Dick would now be warm.

Suddenly a terrific uproar started in the new stall. Dow awoke with a blood-curdling yell.

"By all the gods in heaven! That horse is plotting to kill me!"

"Quiet, Dow, for Pete's sake!"

Dick pounded up the trail, snorting wildly, raced to the water hole, then thundered back to his stall.

R-r-r-rip went the canvas as he seized it in his teeth and tore it from top to bottom. Back he ran to the trail, hammering and whistling like a laboring engine.

"I'm dying!" yelled Dow. "If somebody doesn't stop that horse—my rheumatism!"

Again Dick returned to his stall and ripped some more at the canvas. He snorted victoriously and thumped his hoofs. The cloth gave some more. Dow hollered at the top of his voice. Everyone yelled for Dow to be still. Dick pounded up and down the trail once more, then returned to demolishing his stall.

It went on like that all night.

After daylight, we inspected the stall. It hung in ribbons. Dick clumped easily up and down the trail, the picture of innocence.

We repaired the damage as best we could, and hoped for the best. But both Dick and Dow gave a repeat performance that night which outdid the last. The tarp was now beyond repair. So Dick ran the trails until warm weather arrived. We felt that we could endure Dick, but not Dick and Dow.

Travelers at this time of year seldom passed Roweburg. We lay off the Council City to Nome trail, but occasionally someone came our way, and we asked him for word of Barry. No one had seen him or heard of him, either in Nome or on the trail. And while this was entirely possible—even probable—for Nome housed many thousands that winter, we looked upon his continued absence as a bad omen.

Though our diet consisted mainly of beans and corn-meal, everyone put on weight. Ed said the inactivity and the fattening qualities did this, though he warned us that our putting on weight didn't necessarily mean that such a diet agreed with us. Scurvy was an ever-present possibility.

I had not only regained the thirty pounds more or less I had lost on the trail, but had added more than a few extra pounds for good measure. The boys at Council City sent word that the dance and entertainment had been arranged and they would call for us the next week with a dog team. Everyone from Roweburg was invited.

We began making elaborate preparations for our debut in Council City society. I got out one of my dresses which had come in from Nome—a real *chechakco* dress, with frills and ribbons—and tried to condition it for the party. Merely getting into it was a struggle. It fit me like an undersize glove, and I had no stays with which to ease myself into the dress without undue strain upon the seams.

Ed was in worse condition than I. His only suit was the one he had worn into the country, and he too had gained considerably in weight. The suit was skin-tight, and he looked like a country bumpkin as the cartoonist sees him on his first trip to the city.

Rowe drawled, "Put a little straw on your shoulders, Ed."

But we didn't care. We were going to that dance!

Ed's hair hadn't been cut for months. He chose me to be his barber—a choice which he soon regretted, for he had always parted his hair in the middle, and I thought it would look better on the side.

The shears were far from sharp, but I sat him on a box and went to work.

I snipped and snipped and snipped. And every time I thought I was done, I'd notice a tuft or two sticking out beyond the others. These had to be snipped off, and I tried to do it carefully, but each time I finished those tufts, there seemed to be an indentation where I'd been shearing. And they necessitated clipping all the rest of his head again.

Finally, he got up and looked into the mirror. "Whoo!" he exclaimed, running his palm across what was left of his hair. "Some kid, hey?"

The part I had tried so carefully to cut into the side immediately stood up.

Rowe said, "You'll kill them, Ed—especially the ladies."

Ed muttered jauntily, "Well, my head feels nice and light anyway."

Fox and James bundled Mrs. Rowe and me into the big sled for the twelve-mile ride, and the men strung out on foot behind. We had a good meal at the boys' cabin, then dressed and went to the hall. There I learned that Rowe had told Fox and James about my having played with Victor Herbert's orchestra, and the boys had slated me for a banjo solo. I wanted to oblige them, but my hands had not yet entirely overcome the results of the fifty-two-day trip, and were stiff and unresponsive. I begged off and finally played a banjo accompaniment to "I Miss You, Lize." Fox and James had popularized my brother's songs since their visit to our camp.

Someone cleared the floor, and a fiddler, a banjoist, and an accordionist took the stage. They struck up a waltz. The dance was on.

Nearly everyone around Council was at the Arctic Brotherhood Hall that night. The music was not good, but it sounded good to us. I slipped into Old Man Dow's arms, to whom I had promised the first dance, and started tripping lightly around the hot, crowded room.

Disaster struck quietly and suddenly. Something gave way, and I felt a certain looseness to my dress. I thought of the man who is dancing when his garter breaks, of the woman who loses her petticoat on a crowded dance floor. Then I felt fearfully with my hand. The man and the woman of legend had nothing on me. My dress had finally burst its seams and split wide open down the back.

I hurried from the floor, ready to cry in embarrassment and disappointment. I had been having so much fun—the first real fun since I left New York. And now, this!

Mrs. Rowe ran to me with my parka.

"Slip this on. Nobody'll know the difference, and it doesn't matter anyway. You've earned a good time."

So I put on my parka and, though the stoves were going full blast and the little hall was suffocatingly hot, I danced until our impromptu orchestra played "Home, Sweet Home." A big supper climaxed the first day of our visit.

On the fourth day, a miner offered me fifty dollars to type some papers for him. There wasn't a typewriter in Council, and my machine was at Rowe's friend's place in Nome. We simply had to get my typewriter. I told the miner that I'd take care of the work as quickly as I could send someone to Nome.

This fifty-dollar offer roused us again to our plight, and sent us back to Roweburg in thoughtful silence. The fifty dollars would buy coal oil and coffee and butter and

potatoes and onions and bacon—enough to keep us going for several more weeks. I kept hoping, all the way back, that Barry would be waiting for us with the money from Lyman and Lang, but knew in my heart it was too much to expect.

Rowe said, at last, "Well, Fizzy, we've got to get that typewriter of yours over here some way. Maybe if somebody'd go into Nome, we could find out about Barry, too."

I said, "If we only had a dog team."

Fox said quickly, "I'll lend you my team if you've got anyone to go to Nome."

Ed spoke instantly. "I'll go. I'll leave first thing in the morning."

"In the north," warned Fox soberly, "we try to stay off the trail when we're alone. You'd better take somebody with you."

"We haven't the money," said Ed. "Besides, Barry was alone."

"No use planning till we see if Barry's back," said Rowe.

But Barry hadn't returned, so Fox had Ed drive him back to Council, then lent us the team. In the morning, the morning of March first, Ed started out for the beach trail, taking the last cent of our money with him.

That night, a blizzard started sweeping across the country. We sat glumly about the cabin and looked into the darkness and tried not to think.

Finally Uncle Howard said, "It isn't like he was on a trail he knew well. He's never been over that winter trail before—never even driven a dog team."

"The dogs'll get him there all right if he holds onto them," said Rowe.

It was a thought worth cherishing.

Days passed in fretful suspense. The storm blew itself

out. Bodies were reported found along the trails. Searching parties left from Council City. Each time they returned, one of our boys was there to look at the frozen form. Dread hung over us.

Eighteen days passed. We felt certain that both boys were dead. We had sat all these days trying to reason their absence out. They couldn't be staying at roadhouses all this time. They hadn't enough money. There was nothing to keep them in Nome if the money hadn't arrived from Lyman and Lang. There was only one answer.

Rowe muttered, "If there was only a telephone to Nome—"

At this moment, we heard the yapping of dogs, and rushed from the cabin. Ed and Barry ran in behind the team and sled. A great shout went up. Even the outsiders came running, overjoyed. Mrs. Rowe cried. My eyes dimmed in happiness as I saw the boys, smiling and happy and well.

"Where were you? What happened?"

"That fellow who was storing Fizzy's stuff was out of town. We had to wait till he came back before we could get her machine."

The answer was so simple and logical that we hadn't even considered it.

Rowe asked excitedly, "How much did Lyman and Lang send?"

Barry looked at Rowe and smiled pityingly. "Not a dime. Not even a letter. I waited around for another mail to come in—stayed at your friend Blake's place. No dice."

Rowe looked bewildered and white. "No word at all?"

"Nothing. I brought back twenty-five pounds of coffee and some bacon with the money you gave us. Blake didn't charge anything for our staying there."

Rowe breathed deeply. Everyone's eyes were on him.

"Don't worry about this. The money'll be in all right—probably got delayed and'll come in on the next sled across the ice. And in the meantime I'm working on something that'll take care of us."

Monty whispered ironically to me, "That wouldn't be your typing job he's working on, I don't suppose."

Ed and I left at once for Council City with my typewriter and supplies. There another disappointment awaited us. When I didn't appear, the miner decided I couldn't locate my machine until spring, and had the papers drawn in longhand.

Fox kindly gave Ed permission to keep the dogs as long as he wanted them, then handed me some folded bills.

"It's that thirty-five dollars I owe you, Miss Fitz. I guess you'll have good use for it now."

It was a godsend, a lifesaver. We set out for Roweburg in a little better spirits. I made up my mind not to tell Rowe of the money. I myself would go to the roadhouse at the Niukluk and buy supplies with the money. I'd at least know this time where my money was going.

When we reached camp, I told Rowe I couldn't get the work. His face fell, and for the first time I saw him show real concern.

"Things may get pretty bad for us now, Rowe," said Barry.

Rowe attempted to throw off the mood of depression which held him. "Oh, we won't starve. We'll always have cornmeal and beans. There's plenty of food value in that stuff."

"People die of other things than starvation," said Barry quietly—"scurvy and things like that." Suddenly, a new interest shone in his eyes. He turned to me and snapped his fingers. "I almost forgot to tell you, Fizzy. The deputy recorder's job is open in Council."

"What kind of work is it?"

Rowe interrupted, his face now alight. "It's right in your line—bookkeeping and typing and entering proofs of labor and location notices and stuff like that."

"Could I handle it?"

"Nothing to it. You'd make all kinds of money too," breathed Rowe, "even more than you earned in Nome."

"Who do I see?"

"Commissioner Ferguson," said Barry. "He's in Nome now. I told him about you, and he said he'd be there for awhile."

"You'd better start out for Nome first thing in the morning," urged Rowe. "Now, if we can only raise money enough to get you there—" His voice trailed off as he became thoughtful.

"Fox paid me my thirty-five dollars today," I said, breaking my promise to myself not to tell Rowe.

"Fine, fine. That'll take you there and back."

"But I was going to buy some supplies for the camp."

"Let that go. We'll get by all right. The important thing now is for you to line up with the commissioner."

Ed said, "I'll take you in the morning."

Chapter Ten

WE LEFT our camp at the confluence of the Fox and the Niukluk rivers before daylight, and sped smoothly across the well-defined trail which led to the main trail between Nome and Council. Later, the sun rose bright and heatless, and our breaths snapped and crackled on the breeze as tiny globes of moisture froze instantly and burst in the forty-below weather. But I had bundled well, and rode with my face exposed.

We planned on spending the first night at Charlie Hackman's Roadhouse, but the place was filled and we pushed on to Topkok Alice's, which we were fairly certain could accommodate us. Travelers avoided Alice's place except as a last resort. We had to sleep inside; we had brought no tent, only blankets and food.

Alice was a character of the trail—a young woman with a grasping hand. Many tales circulated the Nome area concerning Alice, but she never bothered to confirm or deny them. Rumor had it that when she heard a dog team approaching, she would rush outside and begin struggling with an ax and a log. Occasionally the traveler

would chivalrously relieve her of the ax and chop enough wood to last a day or two. Alice, certain then that she had a witless guest, would add a dollar or two to the lodging bill by way of gratitude.

Alice was a sharp-faced young woman of about thirty. She lived alone in a little sod igloo, which consisted of four bunks, a tiny stove, and a dirt floor. She was greedy to an extreme. If travelers were caught in a blizzard and could get no farther than Alice's, she showed no hesitation in charging eight or ten dollars for a night's lodging, even though, if the place were crowded, this meant only a bed on the floor.

Our thirty-five dollars had to carry us a long way. Not only to Nome and return, for we also hoped to save enough to buy a few provisions for the camp. And now, as though in ominous prophecy, circumstance forced us to spend the first night with Alice.

Our dogs began yapping when Alice's place lay far ahead. By the time we reached the roadhouse, Alice waited in a ring of yellow lantern light, chopping half-heartedly at a log.

Ed made no effort to assist her, and the woman gave up her sham, and entered the sod igloo with us. We ate supper, then sat around on boxes and waited for bedtime. The bunks jutting from the wall almost filled the dirty little 8x10 sod hut.

Alice asked suddenly, "Say, you're with that Rowe outfit, ain't you?"

Ed nodded.

"Then that'll be ten dollars," stated Alice firmly. And added, "In advance."

When Alice was filling the stove, Ed whispered bitterly, "Everybody loves Rowe!"

We stopped at Port Safety the next night, and found that the settlement had recovered from the flood. Here

the roadhouse keeper, who operated a clean, respectable place, charged us only two dollars each for a good supper and a night's lodging.

The following night we reached Nome, and I set out at once to find Commissioner Ferguson. I felt the bottom drop out of my world when I learned he had left for Council City the day before we started for Nome. We had missed him while he was traveling up the Nome-Council City trail, and we were heading for it from Roweburg.

Ed and I looked for Arthur Blake, the mining engineer in whose loft I had stayed when we first reached Nome, and where Ed and Barry had stayed while they waited for my typewriter. Blake had switched cabins with another man, and now occupied a much smaller place. He made us welcome and said we could stay with him, but the new quarters had no loft—only a tiny single room and a lean-to.

Blake said, "You can have the bunk, Miss Fitz, and Ed and I will sleep in the lean-to."

I wouldn't agree to this, for I didn't feel I could ask this man, who was kind enough to help us, to give up his bed. There was room for only one person in the lean-to, one person on the floor of the cabin, and one in the narrow bunk. Finally he agreed to let me sleep in the lean-to, while Ed slept on the floor of the cabin.

Four inches of ice crusted the walls of the lean-to—the accumulation of four months' steam from cooking by the former tenant. If we let heat into the lean-to, the ice would melt on me. So it remained cold.

But I ignored the cold, ignored everything. My world had clattered down around me. My chances of finding work were gone because we had missed the commissioner.

I spread my blankets on the floor and went to bed. Soon the damp air and the dampness of the ground penetrated the blankets. Sciatica and rheumatism began pounding

through me. I developed a hacking cough. My face felt fevered, and my head giddy. By morning, I was in misery.

A storm had begun during the night, and snow mounted higher and higher around the cabin. But while Ed went to the post office to inquire about mail from Lyman and Lang, I bundled up and went into the business district. I had made up my mind. I would find some sort of work. Nothing could ever drag me back to Roweburg.

I canvassed the town from end to end. Everything was at a standstill, with most of the proprietors or managers outside for the winter. No one wanted a stenographer or a bookkeeper. Perhaps in the spring. Sorry.

My last call was the Nome Abstracting Company. Here, the resident manager told me that there would be an opening in the spring—that the president of the company would arrive from the outside by the first boat.

"I'll arrange with him to give you some work," he promised.

"But there's nothing now—nothing at all?"

He shook his head. "Shall I hold the place open for you in the spring?"

"I'll be back some time after the break-up."

There was no other place to seek work. I returned to the cabin.

"No mail," said Ed.

It was as we expected. I told him of my failure to find work—of my determination to stay in Nome.

He shook his head. "You'll have to come back, Fizzy. You can't stay here and starve."

We argued. I felt that starving in Nome was preferable to starving in Roweburg. But common sense prevailed, and I agreed to return with him. At least I'd have a place to stay if my illness became more acute.

The snow pelted down harder and harder, driven now by an angry gale. Ed hitched the dogs and bundled me

into the sled. We said goodby to Arthur Blake. I felt very weak and sick. My cough had become worse since my tramp through the streets of Nome.

Ed pulled the tarpaulin over my blankets.

"I'll have to cover you all the way," he said. "You couldn't buck this storm with an exposed face."

I objected.

Ed added, "Fizzy, you're too sick to face this weather. With the tarp over you, you'll at least stay warmer."

The tarp went over my head, was lashed tightly to the sled. I would see nothing more of the world until we reached Port Safety that night.

By the time we pushed through the raging blizzard as far as Safety, I realized how sick I was. My endurance was gone. The terrible fifty-two day trip from Nome to Roweburg and subsequent improper food had undermined my health. The previous night's experience in the damp, ice-mantled lean-to had administered the final touch.

I lay in bed four days in Port Safety while the storm raged on. On the morning of the fifth day, we had only a little over four dollars left of the thirty-five, and one more stop in a roadhouse lay before us. We would have to move on, or find ourselves stranded without money to complete the trip. And there would be no provisions for the camp. Ed and I would be fortunate if we reached Roweburg on what we had. And we knew better than to ask for credit.

Ed bundled me in. The sled jumped ahead. The wind and the storm were a continuous thunder against the tarp. My breathing was difficult, and my body ached continuously. Several times I thought the sled was going to turn over.

We reached Solomon at two o'clock that afternoon, and Ed almost passed the settlement without seeing it. The place was completely buried under fifteen or sixteen

feet of snow. Here and there a stove-pipe stuck out, but in the fury of the storm, Ed had passed most of them by.

He located the stove-pipe of the roadhouse and unlashed the tarp. I looked out upon a strange world—a white world misted with blowing snow, through which a stove-pipe occasionally loomed. Later, I learned that as the snow deepened in these completely buried communities, the inhabitants simply added another length of stove-pipe, holding it steady with wires which had previously been set in the ground. They made no immediate effort to shovel their cabins clear. Many notices of claims were found in the high limbs of trees, after the break-up. A locator would stake his claim in the winter, while the snow lay twenty or thirty feet deep. The location notice gradually either settled to the ground or stuck in the trees.

We left the five dogs in harness and circled the stove-pipe until a depression in the snow indicated a possible entrance to the roadhouse. Then we got shovels from the sled and started to dig. We had cut fifteen steps in the hard packed snow before we uncovered the door.

We dared not waste too much time. With our funds so low, we could be on the trail only one more night. And we had either to go beyond Topkok Alice's or prevail upon her to be reasonable. So we warmed ourselves for fifteen minutes, drank some hot coffee, then set out once more for Roweburg. In this short time, the steps which we had cut were drifted full and had to be shoveled out again. Ed yelled at the dogs, they shook themselves from their beds under the snow, and we were ready. I crawled back into the blankets, and Ed lashed me under the tarp.

I wore woolen underwear, a heavy sweater and skirt, my fur parka, and a denim coat. Wool stockings, lynx-skin stockings, winter muckluks padded with straw, and

a pair of high deerskin boots covered my feet; yet I was miserably cold. My head spun with illness.

I could sense the struggle Ed was putting up against the terrible force of the storm. The wind and snow battered against the canvas. The sled skidded crazily. Ed's shouts at the dogs were battered to a whisper by the elements.

The wind raced from inland Alaska, swept across the beach trail and hurried the falling snow onto the ice of Bering Sea. There was no windbreak, no sheltered trail we could follow.

We rocked along, the sled skidding and jumping under pressure of the gale. Only a few yards—possibly feet—separated the trail from the frozen sea. If the wind carried us from the trail, slid us onto the ice, and if the ice broke off—I remembered the white fox drifting toward death on the ice floe.

Ed yelled something unintelligible. The sled rocked and bumped violently. I thought several times it was turning over and would trap me. Then it stopped abruptly, and the storm raged around the tarp.

Ed's voice yelled faintly through the canvas at my ear, "We've blown out on the ice!"

"Let me out! I'll help!"

"Stay there! We're safe as long as the ice holds!"

"I'll be trapped!"

"I'm going to try to head back!"

The sled jumped crazily, rocked, slid forward or backward—which way, I could not tell. I heard Ed yelling encouragement at the dogs. I lay sickly in the darkness of the tarpaulin, too ill to care much what happened.

There were long moments of no sound but the shrieking storm. Then Ed yelled something which I couldn't understand. I screamed back at him. The sled started go-

ing over. I braced myself, but something jumped on my head, then bounced off. The sled righted itself. Voices cried out, and I realized Ed was yelling at someone.

"There's a woman under the tarp!"

The sled began moving ahead more firmly. We jolted across uneven surface. Then the going became less rough.

"We're off the ice, now," called Ed.

I sighed with relief, relaxed my tensed muscles, closed my eyes and my mind, too weary to inquire even whose voice I had heard.

Hours passed in the cold darkness. My body ached. The wind battered against the tarp. My cough deepened until it felt as though I would draw blood each time I succumbed. Then suddenly we were out of the storm.

Ed stopped and stripped back the canvas. Overhead, stars were shining, and the sky looked very dark and cold.

"Keep your head covered with a blanket," ordered Ed.

"Who was the other man I heard?"

"He was with a party that passed. They saw we were having trouble and he came out on the ice to help us get back. Just then the sled started going over, and he jumped on it. He left us about dark."

Nine o'clock arrived before we reached Topkok Alice's. Ed stopped the sled. "What'll we do? We'll have trouble making the dogs go any farther."

"Tell her how much money we've got. She'll have to take us in."

Ed strode to the igloo. Alice opened the door and waved him away.

"No room. Full to the roof. Try the next place."

"We'll have trouble with the dogs."

"Can't help that. There's no room here."

The door closed. Ed returned to the sled.

"You know what that means," he began soberly.

"When Alice is full, there isn't room for even a dog in any other roadhouse around here."

"We'd better try Charlie Hackman's."

We had trouble with the dogs, as Ed expected. The Alaska husky learns to expect his food at certain places. He starts out in the morning without being fed, and will travel uncomplainingly all day. But at night he expects his reward and learns very quickly that he is fed at certain places—usually a roadhouse—along each trail. When he arrives within a mile or two of the roadhouse, his memory awakens. Regardless of how strenuous the day's trip, he redoubles his efforts, increases his speed, and howls a herald of his coming. But if, like tonight, something unforeseen takes place and he cannot be fed without further work, his disappointment is great.

With difficulty, Ed forced the dogs back onto the trail again. They went at their task sullenly, showing resentment and anger. We made poor progress until they remembered Charlie Hackman's. Then they began barking and howling, and increased their speed.

Ed went into the cabin. In a moment, he returned to the door with the proprietor.

"I tell you there ain't even hardly room for another dog in here," argued the man. "I'm sleeping on the floor with four men and ten dogs, and there's another fifteen dogs in the shed as it is."

"That makes no difference. This lady's sick, and she can't go any farther."

The man, dirty and unkempt and bearded, moved to the sled and eyed me sympathetically.

"You pretty sick, lady?"

"Sicker than I've ever been before."

He shook his head and clucked his tongue. "Well, I dunno—" He scratched the dark, matted beard. "I'll go

back and wake a couple of the boys who're bunking together. Mebbe they'll figger out something."

In a moment, he returned, smiling. "They'll sleep on the floor, and you kin have their bunk, lady."

Ed thanked him and unloaded the grub box. Charlie Hackman helped me out.

The little cabin was about 12x14, with two double-decker bunks against one wall, a Yukon stove glistening ruby-red in a corner, and a small table and miscellaneous boxes making up the rest of the furnishings. Six men and ten dogs now lay curled around each other on the dirt floor. Six more men slept in the bunks. One bunk, a lower, had already been emptied.

We picked our way over the sprawled forms. An odor of hot, unclean bodies and damp muckluks and stale tobacco smoke and wet dogs nearly floored me. With the terrific heat of the stove, the effects were nauseating, but I stumbled into the vacated bunk. Charlie flopped into his blanket on the floor and fell instantly asleep. Ed threaded his way through the sleeping dogs and men and set down the grub box.

I thawed out some food for our dogs—dog-bacon and dog-rice, so called because they are unfit for human consumption—and cooked beans and baking powder bread and coffee for Ed. I had bought a little cocoa in Nome and now made a cup. It was all I felt my stomach could hold.

Ranged about the drafty little stove were the pads of straw from the mushers' muckluks. And from these pads rose the sharpest of the odors which filled the cabin. But the odorous straw was guarded by every musher like something priceless, which in truth it was, once the musher hit the trail, for it could not be replaced. Constant usage packed the straw and molded it to the exact contours of the owner's feet. When he camped at night,

the straw was carefully removed from the muckluks and placed close to the stove. When the heat warmed the straw, which had dampened during the day with perspiration, the air became very foul. In my weakened condition, I fought to keep the cocoa in my stomach.

Ed left to feed the dogs and lock them in the adjoining shed. I made my way back to the bunk. We had left our blankets in the sled, and those which Charlie furnished were probably lousy, but I didn't care—was too sick to care. I wanted only to lie down and forget about myself.

Ed returned from feeding and quartering the dogs. There was no room for him on the floor. He looked about tiredly for a moment, then sagged down onto a box and prepared to wait out the night.

I whispered, "Ed."

He looked up. I patted the bunk.

"You've got to get some sleep, Ed."

"I'll be all right here."

"Don't try to sit up. You'll need rest for tomorrow."

"Nobody'll get much rest tonight. Tony's * in the dog shed."

I moved to the inside of the bunk. "You'd better lie down, Ed. It'll be all right for you to lie here."

He hesitated a moment, then picked his way across the floor and fell into the bunk.

"If Tony starts a fight, wake me—"

His voice trailed off. He was instantly asleep, breathing deeply. Poor Ed. He had been at the handlebars of the sled twelve hours.

Tiny flickers of light penciled through the cracks and the draughts of the stove. The wood snapped and crackled. The dogs in the cabin stirred restlessly and emitted

* Tony, a leader, had the reputation throughout the Nome District of starting a mass dog fight at every opportunity. He usually lived up to that reputation.—J. O.

little noises. Their legs jerked spasmodically in dreams. The men snored in utter exhaustion. Outside, the wind whispered its death rattle.

Then a low, warning growl rumbled from the dog shed. A moment of silence as I listened apprehensively, then another growl, louder and more ominous this time. Suddenly, pandemonium broke loose. Dogs growled, yelped, snarled, cried out in pain or rage. One dog ki-yied shrilly, and there was a quick scampering and scurrying of padded feet. Tony was living up to his reputation.

The dogs in the cabin sprang instantly to life and ganged up near the door to the shed, whining and snarling and surging against each other, eager to join the fray on the other side. The snoring men muttered and turned in their sleep. Charlie, cursing terribly, jerked awake, stumbled to his feet and struck a match. The match burned his finger and went out. Renewed cursing, joined now by oaths and utterances from the sleep-drugged mushers and the snarling dogs on both sides of the door.

Another match sputtered and cast an anemic glow across the landlord's whiskered face. Another curse. Another match. At last, the lantern burned.

Charlie picked his way carefully to the door. The dogs crowded close, tripping him and causing him to step on the arm of a sleeper. Charlie cursed the dogs and the sleeper alike. I stifled a hysterical desire to laugh. Beyond the door, the fight raged on.

Charlie kicked the cabin dogs aside and stepped quickly into the shed. Feet thumped hollowly against furry sides. Curses, howls, yelps. Then sudden quiet.

The landlord returned to the room, again kicked the cabin dogs back from the door, blew out the lantern, rolled into his blankets, muttering angrily to himself, and snored lustily within a minute. The cabin dogs cir-

clad and curled and went to sleep. Through it all Ed hadn't moved.

For a half hour, the dogs remained quiet. I started to doze, when another preliminary growl roused me. The growl became a chorus of snarls and yelps and howls. Charlie stumbled and cursed and finally quieted the dogs and returned again to his blankets. This routine repeated itself at regular intervals all night.

Finally dawn grayed the sky, and we set out for Roweburg, planning on reaching our destination before dark. We had to make the balance of the trip that day. Charlie Hackman had got the last cent of our money.

We made fine time until we came within about four miles of a small roadhouse where we planned to rest before making the final dash to the camp. But the dogs were too eager and slammed hard into a bank of snow. The traces snapped, and away went the dogs for the roadhouse, where they probably thought they would be fed. Ed plowed after them, yelling for them to halt. And I was left suspended in the snow bank at a forty-five degree angle, halfway up the side of a hill.

I started to move, but the sled teetered. I could do nothing. If the sled broke loose, I might be buried under it at the bottom of the bank. The temperature hung around fifty below. I was weak and sick and couldn't risk being buried in the snow. It meant that I must sit perfectly still until Ed returned with the dogs.

The hours passed slowly. The cold ate into my body. The discomfort of my position mounted as I remained glued in one position, half sliding from the sled, half tensed to retain my place. I felt that my back would break.

Now the wind rose and whipped sharp mists of snow into my face. Fear awakened that the dogs would run all


the way to Roweburg or Council City before stopping, that I would freeze before Ed returned.

But at last he came back with the dogs, angry and tired.

"They got all the way to the roadhouse," he breathed, hitching them to the sled.

Darkness had long since fallen when we reached Roweburg.

Chapter Eleven

 MY ILLNESS would today have an awesome name, but after the fruitless trip to Nome in 1901 I was just plain sick. There was no medicine with which to doctor me, so I simply lay quietly in bed and waited for the illness to pass.

While I convalesced, Fox sent word that at last accounts the commissioner had not yet appointed a deputy recorder.

Rowe said, "We've got to get you up, Fizzy. We're all depending on you now."

Anger burned for a moment, then expired. Rowe's helplessness in this emergency was inborn. Some men could face a situation like this and fight their way out. Others couldn't. Rowe was one of the others. With the exception of Ed and Barry and the three Marks boys, nearly everyone in camp was equally as helpless as Rowe. All of them sat down—or, in this case, stayed in bed—and waited for someone else to step out and help them. There was nothing for me to do but hurry and get well.

Ed had returned Fox's dogs by the time I was able to

make the trip to Council City, so, with Ed and Monty Marks for company, I set out on the twelve-mile journey.

The trail up the Niukluk was fairly good, and snowshoes were unnecessary. A few miles out, we came upon a great flock of ptarmigan, pure white, and for some reason absolutely immobile on the ice of the river. As far as we could see, the birds squatted so thickly almost no open space existed between them.

The ptarmigan's flesh is good, and we rushed into them, intent on procuring fresh meat. We caught dozens with our hands, slit open the breast, and scooped out the meat. Unfortunately we had nothing but our pockets in which to carry this meat, and had to cease the slaughter when our pockets were full. The birds had flown away when we returned, and we hadn't at the time thought to kill them and cache the meat until we came back.

We arrived at the bend in the Niukluk, and saw Council lying on the high bank in the distance—a tiny cluster of frame or log dwellings and buildings above the L in the river. A few small shacks clung to the river flat below the town. Rolling, snow-covered hills extended for miles in every direction. It was somewhat like a scene of the Montana foothills.

The recording office was fairly large by contrast to the other buildings of the community. It had been built of logs, and consisted of two rooms—the office which would be occupied by the deputy, and the commissioner's office beyond.

The commissioner, who was known both as Judge Ferguson and Captain Ferguson, a heavy, nearly bald, round-faced man of medium height, sat at his desk in the inner office. He looked up with kindly interest, and asked me to come in. Ed and Monty waited in the outer office.

Judge Ferguson looked more like a New York businessman than a minor government official of the frontier. He

wore a neat dark business suit, with a wing collar and bow tie. A heavy gold chain and fob hung from the top buttonhole of his vest to the top left pocket. His heavy dark mustache and sparse hair were neatly combed and brushed, his suit nicely pressed. He always impressed me this way—a sincere, trustworthy man in his late fifties or early sixties.

I had brought my references with me—the same references which had opened a place for me with the Rowe Mining Company, such as it was. But Judge Ferguson, after looking at them, dealt me a severe blow.

“I’m sorry. You could probably have handled the work nicely. But I appointed a man to the deputy recorder’s place.”

My disappointment must have shown quite plainly, for he added, “Don’t take it too hard, Miss Fitz. I may be able to use you here as a bookkeeper and typist.”

He showed me the books, and I assured him I could handle the work without difficulty.

“What are you doing now?” he asked.

Regretfully, I told him of my connection with the Rowe company. A change quickly came over him.

“The Rowe company,” he repeated slowly, watching me the while and fingering his mustache. For several moments he remained silent, then he asked, “How did you happen to get mixed in with that crowd?”

I told him, in as few words as possible, the circumstances which had brought me to Alaska with Rowe. Judge Ferguson listened quietly, nodding occasionally as I talked.

“I’m still under contract,” I concluded, “and it doesn’t expire until October. But I’m going to stick it out—give the company its share of my earnings. After that, I’ll go on my own.”

Again he remained silent for a few moments, and I

heard Ed and Monty talking in the outer room and the yap of a dog from the trail outside. I felt like the little girl just out of business school, being interviewed for her first position. And I wanted to secure this work just as desperately as any beginner.

At last, the judge said, "Well, I'm willing to take a chance on you if you're willing to take a chance on me. I'll give you a trial as typist and bookkeeper. You can start work July first."

"July first!"

His face crinkled in a smile. "Yes. There isn't much doing here until several weeks after the break-up when the floods subside."

I left the office determined somehow to hang on until July first. The pay wouldn't be much, but it was a start, and would assure me of a living until my contract expired. After that, perhaps I would be well enough established to go on my own. I knew there would be lean months ahead—months when all of us would suffer because everyone distrusted any associates of Bill Rowe, who had twice before cost Alaskans dearly. But I would hang on somehow until fall—until I was free to go on my own.

By April first, dawn came at six o'clock, and daylight lasted twelve hours. But the days and nights usually remained just as cold as in midwinter. We still depended upon the little beef-extract jars with their dab of grease and rag wick for light. The extreme cold kept us indoors most of the time, and drove us to wits' end to pass the time until the break-up. As a result, we devised all sorts of childishly pathetic games.

Old Man Dow was deeply interested in spiritualism, and made a ouija board from a piece of cigar box and a board from a packing case. For a limited time each eve-

ning, we lighted our improvised lamps and explored the occult.

Dow called upon everyone to try his board with him—everyone but me. I had previously announced that I wouldn't act as a medium in such a silly game.

But with each person who sat across the board from Dow, the old man had negative results. He became terribly despondent.

"I jest know it'll work," he complained. "All I need's somebody who's psychic." Where he had learned the word, I never knew. But he looked at me forlornly, and my heart responded. Silly or not silly, I couldn't spoil the old man's fun. He wanted to believe in his ouija board, and now it was up to me. He made an appeal. "Come on, Fizzy. I know you're psychic."

"Me—psychic! It's the first time I've ever known of it then."

"There's a lot that's never been explained." He started on a long exhortation regarding the Unknown, a subject which had fascinated him more and more during the winter. To forestall him, I sat down across the board hurriedly. "All right. I'll try it with you."

We placed our fingers on the planchette and waited. Old Man Dow looked up at me eagerly. Nothing happened.

Most of the Rowe company stood or sat around in the dim light of the jars of grease. Disappointment began shrouding Dow's face. Someone in the company tittered.

Then the planchette started to move, slowly spelling out, "J-a-k-e."

Dow cried in excitement, "I knew it'd work! That's my old pardner Jake Fiddler. He wants to talk to me."

We all knew of Jake. Dow spoke of him often.

Someone said, "Quiet or you'll scare him away."

"Ask him something," said Barry.

Dow cleared his throat.

"Am I gonna find gold?"

The planchette scratched slowly across the lettered board. "Y-e-s."

"When?"

"S-o-o-n."

"Where?"

"L-a-t-e-r."

"Later?" cried Dow. "What d' you mean, Jake—later?"

The planchette remained stationary. The disappointment returned to Dow's face.

Barry said, "He means he'll tell you where to go later on."

"Is that right, Jake?"

"Y-e-s. T-i-r-e-d n-o-w."

"Tired. That sounds like Jake, all right. He was always tired."

The board became the talk of our little community. Old Man Dow was ecstatic. Nightly he talked with Jake, but his ghostly partner was always too tired to reveal the whereabouts of any gold. This particularly enraged Dow, for by now he felt that the hidden treasure was his.

All of us came to love Jake. He settled any number of disputes which arose between Dow and the other members. One night the ghost even ordered the old man to stop yelling and cursing every time Dick, the horse, raced up and down the trails outside to keep warm.

Each evening there was a rush to the table as the tiny lamps were lighted. Their glow cast an eerie mantle over the scene, and sent Dow into further occult ecstasies.

He began living only for these moments in the evening. And though I asked to be excused, and the others tried again to help him, he swore they cheated or didn't vibrate correctly or something, and hollered until I came back.

The pastime palled on me and the rest of the camp at

last. It was a tiresome and utterly childish routine, but not to Dow. His enthusiasm knew no bounds, and we began fearing the game would take complete control of him if he were not discouraged before the break-up. His childish belief was no longer amusing. Yet nightly I sat with him at the board.

Strangely, Jake the ghost seemed to sense my boredom, for on what I determined was to be my last night he plunged immediately into the subject which was to set Dow wild and keep his eyes fever-bright for weeks to come.

The planchette slowly spelled out, "T-h-i-s i-s t-h-e l-a-s-t. G-o-i-n-g l-o-n-g t-r-i-p t-o-m-o-r-r-o-w b-u-t w-i-l-l t-e-l-l a-b-o-u-t g-o-l-d t-o-n-i-g-h-t."

It was a long sentence for the ouija board, but it had its effect on Dow.

"He's gonna tell now! I can get my gold!"

The planchette creaked across the board. "D-o-r-o-t-h-y."

Everyone repeated, "Dorothy, Dorothy—anybody know anybody named Dorothy?"

Nobody knew anyone named Dorothy.

"Who do you want to talk to?" asked Dow.

"F-r-e-d D-o-w."

"I don't know nobody named Dorothy." Dow paused, then added, humbly, fearful lest he hurt the feelings of some departed soul, "Unless it was some girl I knew long ago and can't remember offhand." Then, as a further afterthought, "I'm pretty old, you know."

Quickly, the planchette spelled, "F-r-e-d."

"Yes."

"D-o-r-o-t-h-y."

"Dorothy who?"

"C-r-e-e-k."

"Dorothy creek?"

"Y-e-s."

"What do you want me to do, Jake?"

"G-o."

"To Dorothy creek?"

"Y-e-s. G-o-l-d."

"Gold!" yelled Dow. "He's telling me now!" Suddenly he tensed. "But none of you can rush off ahead and jump my claim. This is my ouija board, and by rights everything's mine I get from it. I'll give you your fair shares."

Everyone loudly assured Dow he was welcome to his interest and theirs too. He addressed his next words to the departed Jake. "Where is Dorothy creek?"

"N-o-m-e r-i-v-e-r."

"Where on Dorothy?"

"N-u-m-b-e-r f-i-v-e a-b-o-v-e."

To anyone who understood even the first thing about placer mining, and each of us knew at least that much now, Jake had told Old Man Dow to go to Dorothy creek, a tributary of the Nome river, and stake No. 5 claim above discovery.

The old man nearly went crazy.

"Where's my blankets?" He jumped up from the board. "Good luck, Jake, wherever you're going, and thanks. . . . Where's the small sled? I'm starting right now."

"It's fifty below zero," I reminded him.

"No matter. I'm a-goin'."

It took a strong argument to delay him. In his mind, each of us planned to keep him in Roweburg, then slip away and jump his claim.

Barry said, "Look, Dow, there's no chance of any of us beating you to the claim. None of us could get away without your knowing it. And if you saw one of us leave, you could get to Dorothy just as fast as we could."

"You could slip off with one of the sleds during the night."

Cecil chuckled. "Why not sleep with the sleds?"

"That's just what I'll do," decided Dow.

On this condition we prevailed upon him to wait for spring.

Almost as suddenly as the planchette started, it stopped. And no amount of coaxing by Dow could make it start again. Jake had gone on his trip. The supernatural had gone permanently dead as far as Dow and I were concerned.

Ed whispered one night, "I never heard of Dorothy creek before. Did you?"

"Yes. Rowe was interested in some claims up there last summer."

Ed grinned and raised his eyebrows.

The days dragged past slowly, but the trails became daily a little more passable. Then an Eskimo came up from White Mountain, about eight or ten miles south of Roweburg toward Golofnin Sound, and brought Cecil a note from a bedridden miner named Dexter. He lay suffering with fever, a swollen, painful jaw, and a badly ulcerated lower molar. Would Cecil come to White Mountain and help him?

Cecil prepared to leave on foot at once.

By now, Rally Marks, Cecil's brother, had become convinced that Rowe's mining enterprises were doomed to fail, and planned on leaving the company as soon as the trails permitted. The Eskimo's visit now decided Rally. The trails were sufficiently open for him to travel on foot. He would leave with Cecil.

Rally had heard somewhere that the steamer *Oraziba*, which had gone aground at St. Michael two years previously, was being reconditioned, and needed an engineer. When Rally left the *Portland*, which had brought him to

Nome as assistant engineer, he had signed an eighteen-months' contract with Rowe. He had worked hard all summer, but now told Rowe plainly that he thought the entire project was a failure and would relinquish his interest in the claims of the company. He surrendered his contract.

"I'm going with Cecil as far as White Mountain," he told me. "From there, I'll strike across the ice alone to St. Michael."

"That's suicidal, Rally. St. Michael's over two hundred and fifty miles."

"Just the same, I'm going. This mining business isn't for me. I'm a sailor, and I'll stick to the sea from now on."

And I might add he made good that statement. He stuck to the sea, and sailed as chief engineer on many a proud trans-oceanic liner. Now he has retired and lives alone in a little house near Darien, Connecticut.

The boys said goodby, and the entire company watched them plod off toward White Mountain. They had no money, no food, no dogs, no sled. Their muckluks had worn out, and their feet were wrapped in burlap bags. We feared for them if a storm arose.

But their expedition ended on a happy note.

They reached White Mountain without incident, where Cecil found Dexter in poor condition. The miner's throat and jaw were badly infected, and he burned with fever. Of Cecil's lost drugs and instruments—the two trunkfuls worth about five hundred dollars—he had only a forceps for extracting upper front teeth and some miscellaneous drugs and equipment. With the available forceps, he would have a difficult time with the lower molar. But he set to work at once, retarded the swelling, got the tooth out, and stayed on at Dexter's cabin until the sick man was on the road to recovery.

Dexter was touchingly grateful, and asked Cecil for a bill. Cecil felt that the man was poverty-stricken, like nearly everyone else who had stayed inside for the winter, and told the miner he'd send him his statement sometime later. But Dexter refused to wait, and gave Cecil a hundred dollars and a fox skin robe. It was like a shower of pure gold from heaven. Cecil later sold the robe for a hundred and fifty dollars in Nome.

With part of the hundred dollars, Cecil bought supplies and muckluks for Rally, and the two boys walked to Cheenik, across the ice of Golofnin Sound, which lay on a neck of land jutting out between the sound and Golofnin Bay. St. Michael still lay more than two hundred miles across the ice of the Bering Sea.

Cecil tried to prevail upon Rally to abandon his plans of reaching the *Oraziba*, but Rally adamantly refused to listen. Nothing could get him back to Roweburg or keep him in Alaska. He was going to the *Oraziba*. . . . Long afterwards I learned the details of his trip.

He started out alone and on foot across the ice, breaking a trail through the snow all the way. Two days after he left Cheenik, a party of men with dog teams began following his trail. The ice broke off, and they were lost at sea.

For fourteen days, Rally plodded steadily ahead. Finally he reached the mainland, but by this time he was snow-blind, and blood ran from his eyes—not water, as the modern motion pictures would have you think. Rally managed to make a pair of goggles* from wood he cut, and got relief, then continued to St. Michael, where he sailed on the *Oraziba*. When he left Roweburg, he weighed about one hundred and thirty pounds. When he reached St. Michael, he weighed eighty-nine.

* These goggles were made by cutting two tiny slits and a nosepiece in a thin strip of wood.—J. O.

Cecil fared somewhat better. After Rally left, Cecil also decided against returning to Roweburg. He paid eight dollars for a steak and sent it back to Monty with word for Rowe that he was relinquishing his stock in the company and would go on his own.

In Cheenik, the inhabitants learned quickly of the fine work he had done for Dexter. Soon, another troubled miner appealed to Cecil for help. This man's nose had been bleeding for forty-eight hours, and he was growing weak. For the case, Cecil had only a package of cocaine, some silk thread and some cotton batting.

He forced the cotton down the nostril, and located the trouble—a ruptured vein which would not coagulate. Cecil, working with almost no equipment, sewed up the break, ordered the man to bed, and stayed with him until all danger was passed.

The patient asked Cecil how much he owed. Again Cecil demurred. The man tucked a folded bill into Cecil's hand. The young medico, thinking it was probably five dollars, put it in his pocket unopened. But when he unfolded the note later, he found a hundred dollars.

Eskimo patients streamed to him by the score. White patients kept him busy. Encouraged, he rented a hotel room at thirty dollars a day and started practicing.

But there is an end to all good things. In a few weeks, all the white inhabitants who had been ailing were cured, and Cecil's practice dropped off. The thirty-dollar-a-day room soon had him indebted to the hotel for between six and seven hundred dollars. The management, however, assured him there was no need to worry—that they could wait for their money. The thirty-dollar-a-day room, by the way, was about the equivalent of one for a tenth the price in the States.

An Eskimo baby fell desperately ill, and the frantic father appealed to Cecil, who promptly moved into the

igloo and nursed the baby through. By this time, Cecil was so far behind there was no sense in his staying longer in Cheenik. He arranged with the hotel to leave, and promised to sign a note for his indebtedness before going.

He told the Eskimo father that he was leaving for Nome. The father asked the amount of his bill. Cecil couldn't conscientiously charge the native for his services, and told the Eskimo to forget it.

When Cecil stopped at the hotel desk to sign a note, they told him that the Eskimo had paid the bill in full. Dead broke, but owing no one, Cecil started on foot for Nome.

During this time, our condition in Roweburg had become intolerable. The outsiders refused to do any work at all. No one made the slightest effort to replenish our supplies. Even the old grease we were using in our make-shift lamps was nearly gone. And Dick had eaten greatly into the supply of cornmeal. We saw that neither the beans nor the cornmeal would carry us through much after the break-up. But when I approached Rowe about the seriousness of our position and suggested he do something, he simply shrugged and muttered over the inhospitable Alaskans.

A man in Council heard that I now had my typewriter, and sent word over that he'd pay fifteen dollars for having a few papers typed. I spent two days working for him, then learned that he had no money and would be unable to pay me until the break-up.

In desperation, I walked to the mouth of the Niukluk, where Niukluk Hannah had her roadhouse. She was coarse, hard-looking—a sloppy, stocky woman of middle age, with a mean eye and a calculating stare. I explained our condition and asked for a little credit until the break-up.

"You're with that Rowe crowd, ain't you?"

"Yes, but I'll pay for this myself."

"No credit."

"I only wanted a few things until—"

"No credit."

A huge stock of oil cans stood outside the cabin.

"Can you let me have just one can? I have some money coming from a Council man, and I'll—"

Her mouth tightened and she turned away. I walked back to Roweburg—back to the complaining and angry men, who hung on simply because they had no money and no place to go.

The departure of Rally and Cecil acted as an incentive to the others. Woody and Wheedon moved into Council City. Monty left afoot for Nome. One by one, the boys drifted away, until by April fifteenth only eight of the original party remained—Rowe, Pop Charles, Old Man Dow, Ed Ferguson, Barry Keown, Uncle Howard, Mrs. Rowe and myself. It was disheartening, but it would mean my retaining just that much more of my earnings during the coming summer.

Rowe planned great things continuously, but when time came to put them into operation, he had already wearied of them and turned to something else. We had planned all winter to start work as soon as possible on our claims around Roweburg. But now those puny claims failed to interest him—the claims we had risked our lives to reach. A bigger and braver enterprise now held his attention.

We would stake the bed of the Niukluk itself, and the dried bed of an old channel of that river. He would bring in heavy machinery to mine it.

"The new river bed showed good color when we prospected it last fall. I'll raise money, and we'll turn the river into the old bed and work the new one. Then when

that's worked out, we'll turn the water back and work the old one.'"

We staked forty groups of one-hundred-and-sixty-acre claims each, using names which we had previously acquired through powers of attorney. Later, deeds were mailed to the persons in whose names we had staked the claims—friends and relatives on the outside—and these persons signed the deeds, returned them to us, and the property was ours.

The work of staking these claims was long and hard; it meant weeks of trudging through the deep, clinging snow. There were so few of us that we worked in relays on 'snowshoes. I had never been on them before; each night I was a wreck, for the claims lay two or three miles away.

After the claims were staked, Ed, Barry and I started burning down through the snow and ice to the sandbars in the Niukluk. This was accomplished by our building a fire of spruce boughs on the snow or ice, and keeping it burning until it reached the sand. In most places the river was frozen completely, with no water running except in the middle channel. We then thawed the sand, panned it, and found eight to ten colors running possibly four or five cents a pan, which indicated that the claims could be worked profitably with large equipment.

Though I had lost faith in Rowe, I worked on the claims because I intended fulfilling my contract by performing whatever work was required of me. I knew that Rowe was indulging in more pipe dreams when he spoke of bringing in heavy machinery. He had had that chance before—even on the fabulously rich Ophir—but he had missed out on it.

The Rowe Mining Company now had so many claims at least a million dollars would be required for their

proper exploitation and profitable management. Not even initial labor had been performed on them, and if we alone were expected to do the assessment work for the year, most of the claims would be lost. There simply were not enough hours or days in a year for us to put ten days' work in on each claim. Rowe would have to hire workers to perform the assessment work on most of the claims—either that or give them up. The entire business looked like a losing procedure.

If he had settled down to business, worked one or two of the best claims, and stuck to them, the company might have survived. But Rowe's characteristics ruled that out. His interest waned almost as soon as his enterprises got under way.

By June first, daylight lasted twenty-four hours, but snow still covered the interior, and the rivers remained ice-locked. The actual break-up, which lay just ahead and which heralded the payment of the fifteen dollars from the miner, meant little by way of immediate relief to inland Alaska. Rather, the break-up worked a hardship upon the people. For several weeks afterward, the trails would be impassable, and floods would rage toward the sea. But once the waters ebbed and the ice was gone, the people of the interior could re-establish their contact with other points. Summer, however, was a thing of short duration inland. It lasted only during July, August and September. After that, the interior lay ice-locked for another nine months.

A traveler brought word early in June that the captain and the engineer of the *Independence*, a river boat, had been trapped by low water and ice the previous fall about four miles above us on the Fish river. Now they had run out of food and were facing starvation. They planned on riding the Fish past Roweburg to Golofnin Bay and

Nome after the break-up, but would need food immediately.

We were rapidly approaching the starvation point ourselves and hadn't a cent of money, but we got out our supplies and set aside some cornmeal and beans. Barry and Ed, good, reliable pack horses of the company, broke a trail across country on snowshoes and brought food to the hungry boatmen.

Before the break-up, the boys made two more trips up the Fish river with supplies. On their last one, Rowe asked Ed to have the captain of the *Independence* stop at Roweburg and take some of us to Nome.

I asked in amazement, "Who's going to Nome?"

"Everybody but Old Man Dow, Pop Charles and Uncle Howard," he grinned. "Lyman and Lang must have come back with the money by now. We'll get it and start things humming."

"But I'm going to work for the commissioner July first."

He nodded. "You also told the manager of the abstract company you'd see him too. There's no use taking that work in Council till you see if you'd be better off in Nome."

"But I promised Judge Ferguson. I ought to tell him if there's a chance I won't be there."

"There'll be plenty of time to tell him after you've been to Nome. See which one pays the most, then decide. If you want the abstract work, you can send word to the judge long before he expects you, and he can hire somebody else. But if you decide to go back to Council, nobody will be the wiser."

His reasoning won me over. It was true that the stenographic and bookkeeping work in Council wouldn't pay nearly as well as had the work in the lawyers' office in

Nome. Perhaps the abstract work would pay equally as well as the lawyers. I owed it to myself to investigate if, as Rowe said, there was time to choose between either position.

He assured me faithfully that there was plenty of time—that I could send word to the judge if I decided to stay in Nome. And once more his assurances brought me worry and trouble and discomfort—almost death in this case.

Bill Rowe! Sometimes I wonder how he evaded tar and feathers!

Chapter Twelve

I HAD always been a light sleeper, waking at the tiniest sound out of the ordinary. And now an unusual noise feathered down from high overhead—a new sound that echoed faintly above the deathlike stillness of the Arctic. It was early morning in June. I sat up quickly, my ears straining to recognize the sound.

Mrs. Rowe stirred in her bunk below me, and I looked over the edge at her. The sound continued—a noise like the recurrent rasping of a file, like the squawking of high-flying geese, only deeper, and broken, and uneven.

Mrs. Rowe nodded, and her face shone happily.

“The little brown cranes,” she whispered. “It’s the first sign of spring.”

We crawled from our bunks and hurried to the cabin door. High above, a flight of cranes arrowed into the north, flying in Indian file. Hundreds of cranes were in that first flight.

“The geese will follow soon,” said Mrs. Rowe. “It’s the break-up—warm weather.”

I breathed deeply. Release at last from our long siege of imprisonment.

The break-up came in the night, and, like the cranes, caught us while we slept. We went to bed with ice locking the rivers. In the morning, the break-up was all around us—a terrifying thunder which swept down the Fox and the Fish rivers and met at our little point at the confluence of the streams.

The unusual noise wakened me, and I realized something was wrong. Faust whined from the floor—a sure sign of the unusual. I crawled out quickly, unable to see in the dark cabin, and stepped into a foot of icy water. No wonder Faust whined!

The shock of the water startled me, and I jumped quickly into the Rowes' bunk. Faust, dripping wet, hopped up behind me. Rowe woke and called happily to the boys in the loft.

“It's here! The break-up!”

They shouted in joy. Old Man Dow came to violent life. The dampness had added new fury to his rheumatism. With every other word he took the Lord's name in vain.*

Rowe lighted one of the beef-extract jars, then made his way up the sides of the bunks to the loft, where he searched out his rubber hip-boots. Water lay deep on the cabin floor and seemed to be rising rapidly.

Outside, some dogs howled forlornly. Barry laughed.

“That's a couple of dogs Fox wanted me to keep for awhile. I guess they're marooned.”

He waded to the door and found the dogs, two huskies, paddling around in the water. The current from the Fox river had flooded into a declivity fronting the cabin. Now the entire point lay under water.

* Dr. Cecil H. Marks, now a New York dental surgeon, told me recently that he learned how to swear during that winter in Roweburg with Old Man Dow.—J. O.

Barry let the dogs in, and we shoved them into the loft with Faust. The water continued to rise, so we moved first the bedding from the lower bunks, then everything else movable, into the loft. Within a short time, three feet of water covered the floor.

When the sun rose, Rowe and Ed waded to the *Fizzy* and an unnamed boat which he had picked up someplace following the loss of the *Flyer* in the flood. They brought the boats to the cabin door, but almost as suddenly as the water had risen, it now began to recede. We cleaned the cabin as well as possible, then started cooking the usual breakfast of beans and corn bread.

By the time we had eaten, the water started rising again. We took to the boats. In a short time, the water lay five feet deep in the cabin. The door was too small for either of the boats to pass through. Anyone wanting to get back inside would have to swim.

Dick, my horse, stood shivering in comparatively shallow water. Loose pieces of ice knocked against his legs. Trees and brush swept all around him. Ed and Barry and I rowed among the trees until we found a place about a half mile from camp where the ground, a spot about ten feet square, jutted above the water. After considerable trouble, we managed to lead Dick to his new sanctuary. Until the water dropped, we brought his feed to him daily.

Since no one cared to swim into the cabin, we tore two logs from the roof and got into the loft. Most of us would have to sleep there, for the water now covered everything in the cabin but the two top bunks.

We took the dogs from the loft and put them on top of the outdoor latrine, which had a fairly large flat roof. Faust watched us sadly until we had rowed about two hundred feet from him. Then he jumped in and swam to the boat. He shivered the rest of the day, while the

huskies comfortably sunned themselves on the little roof.

Rowe had donned his rubber coat at the same time he got his boots. To our joy, he found four rifle bullets in the pockets of the coat, and they fit the old ammunitionless gun he had brought to Council. We left Rowe on the roof of the cabin and rowed from sight while he waited for game to fly past.

Four times wild geese skimmed by overhead. Four times the gun spoke. Four times nothing fell. It was a hard blow.

Rowe replaced the gun in the loft and returned to the boat.

The camp lay in a triangle created by the Fox and the Fish. The Fish was normally a wide stream, but the Fox was much smaller. Now both were swollen out of their banks and created a vast sea, which reached a quarter of the way up the trunks of the spruce trees on our point. The high water was caused by an ice jam at the mouth of the Fox, where it emptied into the larger Fish. This jam created a swirling backwater which surrounded us for miles.

At the break-up, most of the ice was about six feet thick. These great slabs hurled down the rivers at express-train speed and snapped off thick spruce trees like matches. There was a continual booming of ice against trees, like the distant firing of heavy artillery.

Rowe suggested that Ed and Barry and I see what we could do about breaking the ice jam. We knew nothing of such procedure—had no dynamite or anything else to help us—but we worked our way in the *Fizzy* as closely as possible to the jam at the mouth of the Fox. Here the ice lay in great piles, forming a mighty barrier, one slab upon the other. Loose slabs floated and spun about. Ed had brought some poles, so, using them for support, we

clambered out onto the loose cakes of ice, and tried to break the jam. Luck was with us that day, for if the jam had let go while we were on the ice, we might have been crushed.

We pried with the poles, then jumped from cake to cake. If we succeeded in moving a few slabs, we jumped back into the boat, to look for another likely spot to attack.

Ed and I had got back into the boat for the eighth or tenth time, and Barry was jumping up and down on a large cake of ice, trying to keep warm. Suddenly, he slipped and disappeared in the water. The spot where he had gone under was tiny—just a mite of open water in all that grinding ice. At any moment a cake might shift position and cover it. And because we feared that if we moved we might shove a cake of ice over Barry, we could only sit perfectly still and hope.

He was under only a second or two, but Ed and I aged in that time. Then Barry's head shot up through the open spot, and we dragged him aboard, sputtering and gasping with the cold.

There was almost nothing we could do. His face was blue and his teeth chattered like a violin in a Bach opus, but we could build no fire. The stove was in the cabin; there was no dry wood. We left him on the roof of the latrine where the sun would do the work.

From Barry's plunge we realized that we would have to set up the Yukon stove in one of the boats. Someone was likely to go overboard at any time. And if we were to eat, our raw provisions would first have to be cooked.

Ed brought the stove from the loft—the same stove we had used on the trail during the terrible trip across the two divides—and set it up in the *Fizzy*. Mrs. Rowe moved in with us and got her pots and pans going and made

cornbread, which she baked in the tiny oven. But not without a struggle. Ed worked an hour before the wet wood would burn.

The water held its five-foot level in the cabin all day. That night we crawled through the opening in the roof. Rowe and his wife occupied one bunk; I had the other. About six inches below us, the water swirled and sucked. The air was bitterly cold—doubly so because of the dampness and the lack of fire. Old Man Dow cursed long and hard that night.

The men took turns throughout the night, watching the water so the others might sleep in safety. Boxes and crates and other debris told of destruction to camps upstream. The ice maintained a steady rumbling all night.

In the morning, we crawled through the hole in the roof and squatted in the boats while we ate beans and cornbread.

"If the rain will only hold off till the water's gone down—" Ed spoke the hope that was in everyone's mind.

I was having my troubles with Faust, who was house-broke. Thirty hours had passed since the flooding of the cabin, and I knew he must be suffering terribly. He would not stay on top of the latrine with the other dogs, so we rowed to the place where Dick waited patiently on his tiny spot of dry land, and let Faust out. Thereafter I rowed the dog there four or five times a day. It was simply another minor irritation in a lot of trouble.

The Fish and the Fox were raging streams that were fed by all the rivers and creeks north of them. And each of these rivers and creeks had in turn flooded and washed out the inhabitants perched along their banks. The roadhouse at the mouth of the Niukluk was one of the first to go. We realized this when an old flat-bottomed boat loaded with cans of oil swept past our cabin. We hurriedly rowed after it and salvaged the oil and stowed it

in the loft. It was the same oil I had seen stored outside Niukluk Hannah's—the oil she had refused to charge to me. Now it was ours by the laws of salvage.

The sun shone for the first two days, and life was not entirely unbearable. But on the third day, rain began falling—a cold steady downpour, which soaked us miserably. We tried staying in the loft, but found this irritating, confining and uncomfortable. Even out in the cold and wet we had a freedom of movement to an extent, and we could see what was going on, and avoid the stuffy dampness of the tight little loft. Our nights became long hours of cramped discomfort.

Finally, the jam let go, and, even though the rain pelted steadily down, the water began receding. Small patches of land appeared. We got Dick from his water-bound corral and tied him to the cabin.

That night Rowe said, "We'd better load Dick on the boat too. Then if Fizzy decides she'd rather work for the commissioner than the abstract company, she can ride the horse back to Council."

"Are you sure I'll have plenty of time, Rowe?"

"Don't see how you can miss. The *Independence* will reach Nome in a day, and you can surely ride Dick back in two. That gives you a week of grace no matter how you look at it."

"How will we live on the boat? The engineer and the captain haven't anything, and we'll have to leave all we've got for Uncle Howard and Pop Charles and Old Man Dow."

"We can take a little; then I'll send provisions back to them as quick as I get the money from Lyman and Lang."

Soon the boat would be coming. And our plans were made.

During these damp days, Old Man Dow had suffered continual tortures with his rheumatism. Each night he

had lain in the loft and cursed the fate which kept him, an old man, in the dampness of the cabin. He cursed the water which swirled about beneath us, and the rain that streamed from overhead. He could not sleep—vowed he'd pitch a tent the instant dry land appeared, and crawl into his blankets and rid his bones of the damp rot which clung to the cabin.

He made good his vow when the flood waters went down. Patches of ground appeared, wet with flood and driving rain. Dow set up Ed's pup tent, wrapped himself in blankets, and crawled inside, moaning with pain, anger and aged frustration. The wetness of the earth must have seeped through the blankets, for at one time he peered from the tent, shook his fist at the sky, and cried, "Thank God, hell's a dryer place than this!"

Then Niukluk Hannah drifted into camp in a small boat. With her were a mother dog—a mixed Eskimo husky—and twelve pups only a few days old.

"The place got flooded plumb out," she announced. "I loaded my oil in a scow, but it got away."

No comment from the poor credit risks at Roweburg. Salvage was salvage. And she was the woman who had refused to spare one can of oil from her large store when we were without light.

"Well, sir," she began, as though she had just dropped in on old friends for a cup of afternoon tea, "I took the pups and the dog and started downstream to find dry land. It was pretty bad. I nearly got wrecked six or eight times."

No one said anything. I relented somewhat and felt sorry for the woman. "You can warm yourself at our stove, if you'd like."

"I'll just do that—might fix something up for the dogs to eat, too. You folks got anything?"

I shook my head. "Just beans and cornmeal."

“Where’s Old Man Dow?”

Ah-ha! So it was true that the old man had been visiting the woman during the winter!

“You know him?” I asked in simulated surprise.

“Well, I’ve heard of him.”

I pointed to the pup tent, which lay beyond a narrow flood of water. Hannah scowled across to him, beached her boat, and pulled aside the flap of the tent.

“Hey, Dow, want a drink?”

She produced a bottle of whiskey from nowhere.

Slowly, as though he were in a daze and couldn’t believe his eyes or ears—as though he were afraid he might dissolve this pleasant picture if he moved too abruptly—Old Man Dow crept on all fours from the tiny tent and extended a palsied hand. He felt of the bottle, smelled the liquor, then pulled heartily.

“Hey, that’s all I got!”

The bottle still pointed skyward.

“Dow, gimme my bottle!”

There was little left by the time she pulled it away from the old man.

All he could say was, “By God, that was a lifesaver!”

“You got a nerve—drinkin’ up most of my liquor!”

“You oughta know better than to bring it around here at a time like this.”

He fell back into his blankets. Almost immediately, his snores rocked the spruce trees.

Barry muttered, “I don’t know which is worse—his yelling and cussing or his snoring.”

Hannah got out some dog-rice and dog-bacon, cooked it on our Yukon stove, then fed the worried mother dog. With greedy eyes, we watched her give the dog that rancid bacon. Any of us would have eaten the dog’s food without a qualm.

Then Hannah cooked a meal for herself—bacon, bread,

coffee. She ate in silence, chewing thoughtfully and asking no one to share it. Without further comment, she climbed into her boat, dipped the oars, and started down the river.

Rowe said, "Nice, sociable lady, wasn't she?"

The flood waters now receded fast, and the trails began to show. We had been isolated from everything by several square miles of water, but soon a man appeared on foot from the Council trail.

We watched him approach the cabin. Rowe muttered, "He certainly didn't waste any time before starting out."

Then I saw who the man was—the miner from Council who owed me fifteen dollars and was to pay me around the break-up.

"I thought you'd be needing this," he said, grinning through his beard and handing me three five-dollar bills.

"Just trying to get to Nome, and thought I'd drop this off."

I was almost speechless with gratitude.

Rowe said, "Now we won't have to take any of the food with us. We can buy some things in White Mountain—can even send some stuff back for Pop Charles and Dow and Uncle Howard."

How Rowe could spend someone else's money!

The ice jam had broken on the fifth day of the flood—a break which had come to us like a continued roll of thunder. The rivers cleared of cakes, and we knew the *Independence* would be along soon after. We prepared to leave without delay. As Rowe had suggested, we would deprive the three old men of none of the food, but would buy supplies and feed for Dick at White Mountain.

The whistle of the boat sounded from upstream; then we saw it, a dirty-looking little craft that had once been white, and now drifted along with only a trace of smoke coming from its funnel. The water was still so high that

the boat maneuvered immediately alongside the bank and dropped anchor.

"Hurry up," cried the captain. "When this river drops, it doesn't fool around with it."

He looked as dirty as his boat—matted beard, sooty nose showing through the bristles, grease on his cap and mackinaw.

"We've got to put the horse aboard," said Rowe.

"Good God—what next?"

He dropped a gangplank and we started trying to woo Dick up it. After an hour's delay, we got him aboard.

The captain said, "We're almost out of wood. We'll have to cut more at White Mountain."

"Fine," said Rowe. "We wanted to stop there anyway."

Up came the anchor, and the current snatched us into the stream. Uncle Howard, Pop Charles and Old Man Dow waved sad farewells.

In an hour we were abreast of White Mountain. The current forced us to drop anchor in midstream. The water eddied and raced and sucked around us.

"Think you can make it to shore from here in a small boat?" asked the captain.

"It's pretty dangerous," said the engineer.

"I'm so hungry I could take a canoe through the Grand Canyon," said Barry, who was going for the provisions.

"I'd better go with him," offered the engineer eagerly.

The captain objected loudly. "You don't have to go. Let one of the others go with him."

Their gazes clashed. "I'm going with him," said the engineer with finality. "Them others don't know nothing about these currents."

I gave Barry ten dollars to buy food for us and something for the horse and something which the store could send to the three old men in Roweburg. He and the engi-

neer climbed into one of the craft's two small boats, and cast off. The captain watched them with anxious, worried eyes as the current flung them from the side of the *Independence* and started them hurtling downstream. They dropped oars and began rowing valiantly.

"Don't worry," Rowe told the captain. "They'll be able to make it to shore and back all right. Barry's handy with a boat."

"And my engineer's pretty handy with a bottle," said the captain sadly.

Rowe's eyebrows raised.

The current pulled Barry and the engineer steadily downstream. They finally landed a mile below White Mountain, then towed the boat back until it stood abreast of the *Independence*.

Two hours passed fretfully. Then Barry returned alone to the bank of the river, loaded provisions and food for the horse into the small boat, and started towing it upstream.

"I wonder what's become of the engineer," said Rowe.

The captain chewed irately on the frayed ends of his mustache. "I don't."

When Barry had towed the boat about a mile upstream, he cast off. The current shot him into the middle of the river, then straightened him out and headed him toward our boat. Worriedly, we lined the rail and watched him struggle, using an oar as a tiller. He seemed to be traveling with the speed of an express train.

"He'll never make it," said the captain concernedly.

As Barry neared us, we could see him trying to sweep the little boat in closer to us so we could grab it when he sped by. But the suction was too great. He would pass an arm's length beyond us.

"Don't try to save the boat!" yelled the captain suddenly. "Jump for it!"

Barry jumped. His fingers touched the gunwale and we pulled him aboard just as the small boat spun in a vicious eddy and went under. Goodby to our food and Dick's feed.

The captain asked, "Where's my engineer?"

"Drunk. He wanted me to buy him some liquor with the ten dollars, but I wouldn't. Then he met somebody he knew, and they started drinking. When I bought the supplies, he wouldn't come back with me. Wanted to fight, so I left him."

The captain muttered direly about drunks in general and the engineer in particular.

"I'll bring him back if I have to hit him on the head," he vowed.

The air blued with curses as he got out the other small boat, dropped into it, and sculled bravely toward the shore. I hadn't trusted his seamanship to the extent of giving him my last five dollars for another supply of food.

His trip was a repetition of Barry's. And he had about the same success in wooing the engineer from his bottle. The captain, too, jumped at the last moment, and the same eddy claimed his boat. Now we were marooned in midstream unless we found a high bank which could accommodate the little river craft.

The captain fumed and sputtered. "Well, we can't get to Nome without an engineer. We'll just have to wait till he sobers up. But in the meantime, we can drift downstream until we come to a backwater, anchor there, and load with four-foot logs while I walk back to White Mountain and try again to get that drunk aboard."

We weighed anchor and drifted downstream until we came to a backwater which permitted us to anchor alongside the bank and drop the gangplank. Vowing horrible things, the captain set off for town.

In a few minutes he was back. The engineer stumbled

along behind him, cursing his superior and yelling terrible threats. The man had followed the boat downstream when we weighed anchor.

As soon as they were aboard the vessel, they tore into each other. Fists flew, and they broke things in general and blacked each other's eyes and opened several cuts on their faces. But in the end, the captain, helped by Barry and Ed, overpowered the engineer and locked him in a small storeroom. For several hours, he screamed from his improvised prison, then at last quieted down and fell asleep. His snoring practically rocked the boat all night.

Ed took my five dollars and bought food and hay for Dick. And while he was in the settlement, he learned that Golofnin Bay was jammed with the ice which had rushed down the rivers.

The captain found cause to renew his cursing. "That means we'll have to stay here till the Bay's clear."

I thought of my promise to report for work in Council City July first—of Rowe's assurances that there would be plenty of time. I spoke to the captain.

"Well," he drawled slowly, "July first's still a ways off. Seems like we'd be in Nome with plenty of time to spare."

I turned to Rowe. "Maybe I'd better walk back to Council. I can't take a chance on losing out on both jobs."

"Listen, Fizzy—the ice in the Bay is only loose river ice. It comes in and goes out with the tides." He turned to the captain. "Is that right?" The captain nodded. Rowe continued, "When we pass Cheenik and reach the Bay, we can wait till the tide goes out, then put on full steam and run around the ice long before it starts back in."

The captain said, "That's possible all right."

Rowe added, "Then it's only a short, overnight jump to Nome. You can look into this abstract work and decide

which you want. You'll be back in Roweburg before the end of this week."

So, against my better judgment, I was won over to Rowe's way of thinking again.

We began cutting logs into four-foot lengths. After a time, Barry yelled and grasped his ankle and hopped about on one foot. He had cut his leg to the bone.

Ed and I helped him to the *Independence*, where Ed applied a tourniquet and shouted for silk thread and a needle. Of course, we had none. Ed threw Rowe a wordless appeal, who stood idly without comment. Then his brave little wife stepped up and volunteered to run back to White Mountain for the needed equipment.

She returned with thread and the needle and clean white cloths. There was no anesthetic, so I brewed some of the coffee Ed had bought and forced Barry to drink it strong and black while Ed sewed the deep gash. Barry turned dead white and swayed giddily, but clung on without fainting. By the time Ed had finished, I was on the verge of fainting myself.

We lingered in the backwater two days, loading logs, but I felt no anxiety, for only a day's travel separated us from Nome. The engineer returned to his work, made peace with the captain, and took his turn with the ax.

At last we had sufficient wood to take us to Nome, and again weighed anchor. By now the current had lessened, and the boat was more maneuverable. We headed for Golofnin Sound, Cheenik, Golofnin Bay and the Bering Sea.

We got out just in time. The river—the Fish—began dropping rapidly. We stuck on first one sandbar then another. Hours upon hours were lost in floating the vessel free. And we still lay eight miles above Cheenik, the little settlement on the neck of land dividing Golofnin Sound from the outer Golofnin Bay.

Now all those millions upon millions of tons of ice which had slammed down the Fox and the Fish and the Niukluk and countless minor tributaries lay ahead of us in Golofnin Sound. The tide swept the ice in as we entered the Sound. The captain sought to run for it, and ordered full speed ahead, but the tide brought the gigantic floe in so fast, we were nearly trapped and wrecked between the ice and the shore. We turned quickly and ran for safer water in the mouth of the Fish.

Here the captain felt we would be safe until the tide changed, but the floe split, and a vast section started creeping around behind us. We weighed anchor and sped upstream.

At the next change of tides, we advanced to within three miles of Cheenik. One of the floes clung here and separated us from the settlement. Ahead of us the ice piled up in the channel between the Sound and the Bay. There was nothing to do but wait.

Outside Cheenik we could see a large steamer, the *Ruth*, which had probably come in while the floe was still in one piece and had not blocked the channel. Then the floe had split, trapping the *Ruth* as she rode at anchor. As we watched, the floe closed in on her, stove a hole in her side and tipped her over. It emphasized what we were up against.

By now, the food Ed had bought was gone, and there was no feed for the horse. Trapped by the floe and without small boats, we couldn't reach shore.

Ed found a can of old lard in the galley. It was vile, dirty and sickening to the sight, but we set it aside in hope that aid would come before we had to eat it.

On the morning of June twenty-seventh, three exhausted men in a small boat came alongside and climbed aboard. We lifted in their boat and made room for them. They

had no food, and we had none to give them. They had come down the Fish in hope of reaching Cheenik, but the ice blocked them from reaching shore.

Finally we divided the lard. I closed my eyes and forced myself to swallow it. Faust, who got half of mine, was the only one who relished it. Dick went hungry.

Gradually we worked through the floes in the channel and entered Golofnin Bay. By now I had lost all hope of returning to Council and assuring myself of the work in the commissioner's office. I couldn't reach shore, and if I did, I had neither blankets nor food to make the trip up the Fish and the Niukluk. Rowe still hoped for a miracle to get us to Nome in time for me to see the abstract company, then hurry back to Council. But he was certain, now, that I'd like the Nome work best. He would be, at a time like this. It was a case, now, of securing that abstracting work or of going without.

But Golofnin Bay lay entirely choked with ice. There was no channel through it, and if we were to attempt skirting its edges, it might mean tearing the bottom out of the boat on the treacherous sandbars.

We anchored in the Bay, now on the southern side of the channel, but still kept from Cheenik by the three-mile floe. Only the opposite shore was open—and this was too treacherous for a boat like the *Independence*, which drew six feet of water.

Rowe argued with the captain and finally coerced him into attempting to make a run around the edge of the floe.

I took the soundings, heaving the lead as the little vessel pushed slowly ahead.

"Ten, eleven, ten, nine, eight—"

The captain would then signal the engineer to reverse the engines. We would back up a little, then anchor again

until they decided what to do. Back and forth, back and forth, getting nowhere with maddening regularity. Most of the time we were partially aground.

At last the captain said, "It's no use, Rowe. We can't get you to Nome. One of these men can row you to the west side of the Bay in their small boat. That's the best I can do."

Rowe cried, "But we're twenty-five miles farther from Nome than when we started!"

The captain shrugged uneasily. "I can't take the chance. I'll either rip the bottom out of my ship or one of those floes will trap me. I'll just have to feel my way back to the mouth of the Fish and wait this out—and that floe may lie offshore till God only knows when."

There was nothing more to be said. His vessel was in danger, and his duty lay in saving it.

Rowe asked, "How will we land the horse?"

"I'll take you as close as I dare. Then we'll have to unload him and let him swim. You and your party can land in the small boat."

We worked harder getting Dick into the water than we did in loading him. But at last he went overboard with a mighty splash, then struck out through the icy water for shore. We loaded our blankets into the small boat, and the owner rowed us ashore. I was thankful to leave the dirty little vessel and find solid ground beneath my feet again on any conditions.

Someone built a fire, and we huddled around it, trying to keep warm. The snow was gone from the beach, but the water threw off a bitterly cold dampness that bit through our blankets. We had nothing to eat or drink.

In the morning, we strapped the blankets, the frying pan and the coffee pot on Dick and set off for Nome—more than a hundred miles away. I carried a small flour sack in which were my personal belongings. Days of dirt

and grime covered me, and there was no way to wash myself really clean. I felt that I looked like a sourdough just in from a winter's hard mush.

We followed the beach until we picked up a rough trail leading across the low foothills between Cheenik and Bluff City. This trail had been used very little and was hard going. But we plugged along in single file, a sickened, disillusioned, tired lot.

My strength started going back on me before we had gone far. Once more, my clothes fit me like sacks, and I judged I had lost twenty-five pounds since we left Roweburg. I wondered how much I would weigh when we reached Nome.

Rowe kept repeating that we'd all get pocket money and everything we could order in a restaurant after we reached Nome and he had got the money from Lyman and Lang. It wasn't much to bank on. Rowe's promises weren't well accepted just then.

At the end of fifteen miles, we camped for the night, which meant simply building a fire, wrapping ourselves in blankets and lying down on the ground. This was the first day of July. Now even Rowe's miracle couldn't save the job which had waited for me in Council. I'd have to take the abstract work whether the pay was good or not.

On the second of July, we covered another fifteen miles. On the third, we reached Bluff City, and Rowe ran into someone he had known in Nome and managed to get us a little food. . . . Ed and I whispered over our predicament if Lyman and Lang had brought no money. It was a terrifying thought.

I lay down on the beach at Bluff City and managed to doze a little. Then I woke suddenly as someone shook my arm.

"Get up, Fizzy. We're taking a boat into Nome."

It was Rowe. He had contacted the captain of a tug which was going to Nome. Our long walk was over.

My weariness must have been close to utter physical and mental exhaustion, for the next thing I knew I was stepping into a dory with Rowe and Mrs. Rowe and Faust.

A villainous looking seaman rowed us toward a small tug at anchor outside Bluff City.

"Where are Ed and Barry and the horse?" I asked.

Rowe shook his head. "They'll have to walk."

"But Barry's leg!"

"Can't be helped. There isn't room for more than us on board. And somebody has to take the horse to Nome."

"Why didn't you walk and let Barry take the boat?"

I might have known there would be no answer. Barry, lame and walking on crutches which Ed had made him from the crotched limb of a tree, while lazy, inconsiderate Rowe enjoyed the relative luxury of the tug!

We rode the bobbing, rolling little vessel all night across the choppy waters of the Bering Sea. Rowe and his wife stretched out flat on the deck, entirely consumed by seasickness. I could feel no sympathy for the man.

We reached the Nome roadstead at seven o'clock in the morning, and I prepared to climb into the dory and go ashore.

"Wait a minute, Fizzy. You and Mrs. Rowe will have to stay on board till I go ashore and raise money for our passage."

Rowe had ransomed his wife and me that he might avoid walking to Nome!

Chapter Thirteen

WE WAITED for hours at the rail of the tug. All sorts of horrible thoughts raced through my mind. Not for an instant did I believe that Rowe would actually be successful in raising money. I had no more confidence in anything, Bill Rowe least of all. And I simply proved that even a Bill Rowe can occasionally be right. My worry was for nothing. In the end, toward noon, Rowe returned, his face bland and cleanly shaven.

Nonchalantly, he pulled a huge roll of bills from his pocket, paid off the captain, and gave Mrs. Rowe and me spending money. When we were ashore, I asked Rowe how he did it.

"Lyman got back and brought some money that had been lying all winter in a lawyer's office in Seattle. Lyman picked it up just before sailing for Nome."

"Where is Lang?"

"Gone. He skipped the company right after they got to New York."

"How much money did Lyman bring?"

"A thousand dollars."

"Only a thousand? You'll need a lot more than that."

"All my other backers lied to me."

"A thousand won't go very far. The things you've been planning will take twenty or thirty thousand just to get them started."

"I'll raise more."

We let it go at that.

Nome roared with life and gaiety. Men and women paraded the narrow streets in extravagant dress. Flags flew from all the buildings and all the ships in the roadstead. The sprawling town blatantly flaunted wealth and good cheer. Everyone seemed in a holiday mood. Then suddenly I remembered.

"Why, it's the Fourth of July!"

"That calls for a good feed," said Rowe.

Nome was growing up, and now good restaurants were not difficult to find. We entered the best in town and ordered from the left side of the menu—fresh meat, vegetables, dessert. I ate and ate of the wonderful food, thought I would never be able to eat again. But in a short time I was back in the restaurant, eating more.

Rowe and his wife left to meet Lyman, and I arranged to join them later. A parade was forming in the street, and I wanted to see it. Bands played everywhere—very bad bands—and guns or firecrackers exploded incessantly. But I loved the noise and the excitement. It chased from my ears the vacuum created by the vast stillness of the frozen Arctic.

From the open saloons and the dance halls, men shouted in good humor, and women laughed shrilly. People rushed back and forth, displaying their finest clothes. And I, like a small girl or a rube at the circus, forgot all about my bedraggled clothes which had been slept in for days, and the grease and grime which could not be removed.

At last the parade started. Faust and I stood on the edge of the sidewalk, with immaculately dressed people behind us and around us. But we didn't care—didn't give them a thought. This was something new—something one couldn't see when one was snow- and ice-bound in the interior of Alaska.

There was nothing definite about the parade—just dogs and horses and men and an occasional haphazard band. Sandwich men with advertisements seemed to predominate. Then a begrimed old sourdough halted his section of the parade, doffed his hat, and bowed low.

"There she is, folks!" he cried. "The real thing—a lady sourdough!"

I screamed, "Whiskers!"

The crowd roared approval as Faust and I hurried into the street and joined the parade with Whiskers and his ancient dog Gyp. We talked of that icy trip across the divides, then left the parade at a cross street.

He told me of his finally reaching Council and of someone's taking him in. Then he heard of a strike farther north, obtained a grubstake, and plunged ahead again. After the break-up, he discovered that his claim was worthless.

I told him of my experiences on the river boat—of the hard times we endured through the winter.

"Until today, we've lived almost exclusively on beans and bread," I added.

"Mean t' say that feller Rowe didn't even know enough to cut a hole in the Fish or the Fox or the Niukluk and catch tomcod through the ice?"

"Tomcod?"

"Sure. They're a nice fish. Good to eat. You could've dug down and either found them frozen in the ice or fished for them."

"We didn't have anything to use for bait—not even any hooks as far as I know."

He laughed. "That Rowe! Tomcod'll bite on a piece of red flannel. He should've known that."

The end of the parade neared. "I'll have to be gettin' back in line," said Whiskers. "But I'll be right here if you ever want me."

Once more with a "so long" and a wave of the hand, Whiskers and his dog were gone.

I found Rowe and Lyman talking things over in front of the hotel, and learned that Lyman had failed miserably in his efforts to raise money in New York.

"Didn't you give the money to my mother?" I cried in alarm.

Lyman reddened and shook his head. "I just didn't have it, Miss Fitz."

"But you promised—"

"I did the best I could. Lang left the company right after we got there. Everything fell on me. It took all my money to carry me through the winter, then get me to Seattle, where the lawyer had the money from one of the backers."

I swung on Rowe. "If you don't send money to my mother at once—"

He raised a palm placatingly. "I'll send it by the first boat."

"You'll give it to me right now and I'll send it myself."

He turned over the hundred and ten dollars I had left in the company's funds the previous fall, turned it over ungrudgingly from the thousand Lyman had brought.

"Tell her you'll send her more real soon," added Rowe. "I'm going to raise money—plenty of it."

A batch of letters which I later picked up at the post office verified that my mother had been unable to obtain

funds from Lyman during the winter. But she had somehow got along, and even managed to send me a box of clothing. In addition, my brother was having trouble with his music publisher over royalties on "The Honey-suckle and the Bee," a best-selling song, which Albert had written. My brother was suing for an accounting.

Early on the morning after the holiday, I reported at the Nome Abstracting Company. They had tired of waiting for me and had given the work to someone else. By now, Nome was over-run with stenographers. I turned sickly from the office and stumbled down the street, wondering what to do.

Several days later, Ed and Barry and Dick arrived in Nome.

I tried to look cheerful—told the boys of Rowe's receiving a thousand dollars, and even showed them that I had a little money myself.

"We'd better see him quick or there won't be any left for us," laughed Ed.

Then he told me how Barry had walked all the way, assisted only by his makeshift crutches. Dick was so heavily loaded that Barry couldn't ride. But the cut was healing nicely, and, though Barry still needed the crutches and limped badly, all danger had passed.

Ed's forehead suddenly wrinkled, and he snapped his fingers. "Say, you'd better be hurrying back to Council, hadn't you?"

I asked him what for, and told him of my losing out on the chance for work at the abstracting company, that I had probably lost out in Council too.

Ed smiled tenderly. "Poor Fizzy. And you've been worrying about it all this time?" I nodded and lowered my eyes, and Ed went on. "Your job in Council isn't gone. We saw the commissioner at Solomon, and he's waiting for you."

"Honest, Ed?"

"You'd better not keep him waiting too long."

Now life was good once more, and the roar of the frontier town became sweet music.

We hurried to Rowe, to unload the horse so I could ride him back.

Rowe said, "I've got a wagon-load of stuff going over to Roweburg. How about your riding the wagon and leaving Dick here for me to use on the claims at Irene creek?"

I looked puzzled. "Irene creek?"

"Yes. We're going into operation there."

"But you can't work those claims without money for heavy machinery."

"I've got the money."

"How much?"

He grinned. "Fifteen thousand."

I felt like swooning. Leave it to Rowe. If someone were around with loose cash, Rowe would talk him out of it.

Finally, I sold Dick to Rowe for two hundred and fifty dollars. Then after the deal was closed, Rowe told me he'd have to pay me later—that he'd need every dime his backer had given him. There were laborers to pay and supplies to buy. In my anxiety to get back to Council as quickly as possible, I agreed to let him have Dick and to ride the wagon to Roweburg, then get to Council as best I could.

Rowe never paid me for Dick. I saw the horse for the last time that fall, when I was in Nome on business. One of the laborers at the camp was drunk one very cold night and covered the horse with his new overcoat. The tippling laborer didn't know Dick very well, for the horse promptly strolled downtown, where somebody stole the coat.

Monty joined us and told of his experiences since he had been away from Roweburg. He had walked all the

way to Nome, alone, in the cold of winter. When he arrived in town he had only fifty cents. The amount was so small he couldn't buy anything. So he went in one of the gambling places and put the fifty cents on number thirteen at the roulette wheel.

Number thirteen came up, and Monty quit playing right then. The dealer paid him off at thirty-five to one. Monty bought a piece of ham, some coffee, beans and flour, and went to live in the cabin of a friend.

Some time after the break-up, while he was idling away the time in a gambling house, he got into a conversation with a stranger who was sailing for the outside that night. The man was very discouraged. He had used his savings to come to Alaska in the hope of finding gold. The summer and the winter went without his earning any money. At last he had written his wife to borrow money on the family furniture so he could return to the States. Now he had his steamer ticket in his pocket, plus about fifty dollars for expenses.

To pass the time, the man started playing small amounts on the roulette wheel. At first, he won a few times. Then he began losing. Gambling fever took hold of him, and he plunged with what he had left. A winning number came up. Again and again he plunged. Each time he won. Monty begged the man to stop playing.

At last he was ahead fifteen thousand dollars, and the operator of the roulette wheel had to close up for a few minutes while he circulated around Nome and raised enough money to pay the man off.

Monty accompanied the man to his ship. As they rode out in a dory, the man became obsessed with the desire to let the steamer sail without him, while he followed his luck at the wheel.

Monty argued with the man, tried to point out that there wasn't one chance in a thousand of his luck con-

tinuing as it had been. But the closer they came to the steamer, the more determined the man became. Monty pointed out that the man had enough to start all over in life—reminded him of that wife and family at home.

When they neared the ship, the man flatly refused to get aboard. Then Monty deliberately picked a fight with him, knocked him out, told the steward the man was drunk, locked him in his stateroom, and stayed on guard until the vessel sailed. The gambler who wanted to push his luck too hard left with his fifteen thousand dollars, and Monty, who had saved the money for him, stood on the beach with nothing in his pockets.

Monty also told me the final chapter of Cecil's Alaska adventures. He walked to Nome from Cheenik after the Eskimo paid the hotel bill. When Cecil reached Nome, he found a job as bartender in one of the better saloons. His first customers were two judges, who were celebrating something or other, and bought two bottles of champagne, at twenty-five dollars a bottle.

Cecil knew nothing about tending bar and little about opening champagne. There were corks in the tops of the bottles, so the logical thing seemed to be to use a corkscrew. Cecil's career as a bartender ended right there.

By now, the steamer *Jeanie* had arrived in Nome, and the ship's doctor had gone gold-hunting. The captain thought Cecil was an M.D.—no licenses were necessary in those days—and offered him the vacant berth.

Cecil jumped at the chance, but the captain asked him to have the commissioner in Nome sign his papers before the *Jeanie* sailed. Cecil couldn't go before the commissioner and swear falsely to being an M.D., but he meant to take that berth.

He waited until only a few minutes before sailing time, then went aboard. By the time that the captain discov-

ered Cecil had failed to obtain the commissioner's signature, it was too late to do anything about it.

Rowe gave me provisions from the company's new supplies, and I climbed aboard the great, flat-bottomed wagon which was taking food and new equipment to the camp at Roweburg. The driver agreed to take me to Council first, rather than leave me at Roweburg and let me cover the remaining distance as best I could.

We rode on the high, unsprung seat of the old lumber wagon, which rocked and jolted across the uneven summer trail—that same trail over which we had struggled on that terrible trip the previous winter. But now the trail, the divides, the Fox river valley, were child's play.

At last we reached the seven miles of tundra which lay between the Fox and Council City—the seven miles of tundra where Whiskers and his dog had turned off. It was my first actual experience with tundra in summer.

The horses were tired from four days of hard travel, but they plunged into the spongy trail. The going became very hard and very slow. The trail had been well traveled since the breakup, and was now almost impassable. Mud and mire sucked at the wheels and clung to the horses' legs.

Three miles jolted slowly past. Then we came to a particularly bad spot, and the bottom dropped out of the trail. The horses were down to their bellies, hopelessly mired.

The teamster and I worked for over an hour trying to raise them, but the more we worked, the deeper the horses sank. At the outset, they tried to respond to our orders, but at last lay unheeding in the mud, utterly exhausted.

Council lay about four miles farther across the tundra—a dot of shacks and tents in the distance.

"I'll have to go for help," said the teamster grudgingly. "You wait here."

"How long will it take you?"

He shrugged. "I dunno. Mebbe two hours, mebbe four. Depends on the trail, and how soon I can get help."

I didn't relish waiting two to four hours there in the hot sun, and the driver disliked making the long, hard trek on foot. We struck a happy medium.

"You wait here and watch the horses," I suggested, "and I'll go for help."

"That's good enough for me," agreed the driver, smiling.

The four miles were a nightmare, and I could understand the teamster's relief at not making the trip. Every step I took was a battle against the mud which sucked at my shoes. I slipped on the niggerheads, fell, rose, then repeated it over and over again. The cluster of shacks seemed to hover in the distance, never getting closer, like the light across the glare ice that night out of Port Safety.

When I finally reached Council, I was entirely spent, covered with mud, and sick in heart and soul.

Judge Ferguson stood in the open door of the recording office.

"I just looked out and saw you," he smiled, indicating a window which overlooked the vast wasteland I had just crossed. "Team get stuck?"

I thanked him for holding the job open for me. He sent his Eskimo boy, Akpak, out to help the teamster, then set about finding a place for me to live.

Cabins were scarce in Council, and rents very high. Most of the places were simply dilapidated shacks. One of them, almost untenable, rented for a hundred and fifty dollars a month.

But the commissioner, through his connection, found a

place that could be rented for a reasonable sum—fifty dollars a month. It was a small log cabin on the flats of the Niukluk, about half a mile from the recording office. This cabin was owned by the marshal.

It seemed like a real find in that land of little, for, though the place was very dirty, it contained a bunk, a stove, a table, some dishes and cooking utensils and the customary boxes for seats. The commissioner assured me that Akpak would help me clean it, so I agreed to take it.

Uncle Howard sent my typewriter and a few of my things over from Roweburg, and I started work, typing letters and other papers, and keeping the books. A kind star must suddenly have started to shine over me, for at the end of two weeks, the commissioner discharged the man he had installed and appointed me deputy recorder.

I was very proud when I took over the books and the records and the big desk in the outer office. A rough and battered old desk, to be sure, with a shelved counter of unpainted boards to hold the records, but now entirely my responsibility. I felt that at last I had got a start in Alaska—that I might become somebody in this new background.

Judge Ferguson's office was separated from mine by a wide archway hung with heavy drapes. These drapes were drawn only at night and when he held court, with my office as the courtroom. At times, I sat behind the drawn drapes and heard the testimony—and occasionally blushed to myself. The commissioner lived and worked in his office—had his bed there, which necessitated using my office as a courtroom. Akpak, his tall, slender young Eskimo boy, lived alone in a nearby cabin and prepared all the commissioner's meals.

I found the new work interesting, though a great deal to perform in addition to my stenographic duties, for

which no one else was hired. The rate of pay was very high, judged by city standards. I received two and a half dollars an hour for entering the records, with additional pay for typing, abstracting and other work. From the beginning, my weekly pay ran into the hundreds.

The greater part of my time was occupied in copying location notices and proofs of labor in the record books. These books were worn and had been badly used, which slowed the work considerably. At some time, I would have to copy all the records into new books—a monumental task, but it would pay well when I was idle.

Later, I became a notary public, and received a fee of two and a half dollars for each acknowledgment and a dollar for each proof of labor affidavit. The money rolled in. At times, Faust roamed the street with as much as three thousand dollars hidden in the satchel tag. For the present, it was my only means of banking.

The records had been neglected terribly. Papers which had been accepted over the counter lay strewn about. No receipt had been given, and I could only guess or depend on the commissioner's memory for the approximate time when each was filed. The miners had staked their claims, then filed them with the former deputy recorder. This worthy had made no chronological note of their receipt—an important detail, for each paper should have been recorded to the minute. Very few papers at all had been entered in the books. When I took over, most of them still lay either on the desk or strewn all over the place. During my first week as recorder, I worked eighteen hours daily and brought the books up to date as best I could.

My cabin had by this time been thoroughly cleaned, and the commissioner had prevailed upon the marshal to locate a bed for me. So at last I was sleeping in a real bed again—one with springs and a mattress. I liked it even

better than the feather bed, which still remained in Nome, but I was some time in becoming accustomed to it, and to this day am unable to sleep well in a bed which is too soft. A sort of permanent reminder of that spruce-pole bed in Roweburg!

My cabin lay far on the outskirts of town, and my closest neighbors, three brothers, all young college men, whose names I can't even recall, lived in another cabin about a thousand feet from mine. But the arrangement suited me. The town consisted mostly of saloons, and I was glad that when I left the office at night I walked away from the town rather than through it.

Fish was plentiful in Council, but it was practically the only palatable food obtainable. As a consequence, when I wasn't eating fish, I was back on the old reliable beans.

The time was now late July, but some of the creeks were still frozen in glaciers twelve to twenty feet thick and a hundred feet or more long. Some of the creeks never thawed at all this particularly late summer. In many cases, placer mining was impossible.

My work was a liberal education in the topography of the country, and familiarized me with the locations of all the claims and the whereabouts of the various creeks and rivers. I became acquainted with many men who failed to make good in Alaska, but who returned to the States and succeeded beyond even their own hopes in other endeavors. Rex Beach was probably the most famous of these men. The list of those who made good both in Alaska and after they returned to the outside is almost endless.

Ophir creek, one of the richest creeks in the world, came under the jurisdiction of Commissioner Ferguson. Before long, I knew this golden stream's history well. The creek was about fifteen miles long and carried gold from source to mouth. The best paying streaks were found from claim No. 9 to about No. 20. Number 15 was

the largest producer, and served as headquarters for the Wild Goose Mining Company, one of the largest companies in Alaska. Already, Mr. Lane, the president of the Wild Goose, had taken many hundreds of thousands of dollars in gold dust from his claims scattered along the course of the Ophir.

The creek enriched others besides the operators of the Wild Goose. George James and six associates took untold wealth from No. 14 on Ophir, then abandoned it before the claim worked out. They were satisfied with what they had taken from it, and left the rest for somebody else. Ed Dunn took a fortune from No. 10. And this was the land which Rowe had held two years before, but which he had passed up for bigger and better dreams.

There were very few women in Council—only the wives of a mine superintendent or two, and the wives of mine foremen and laborers. Of course, there was a profusion of women of the other sort—the girls who worked in the saloons and dance halls and houses of ill-fame—but they lived in a little world of their own, and I seldom saw them; their business did not bring them out in the daytime, nor from the section of town they occupied.

Gold was discovered in the Council District two years before on one of the tributaries of the Ophir. Experts from the States came in at fabulous salaries to examine the soil of Ophir scientifically. The result of their tests was not heartening to the mining companies who had imported them.

“There was a small showing of gold, but such dirt never carried gold in paying quantities.”

Rowe always claimed that these reports were his reason for not trying to develop his property. At any rate, the experts packed up their instruments and returned to the States, and the mining companies abandoned Ophir creek.



Main Street, Council City, 1901

But other men soon appeared on the scene—men who made their tests not with high-priced instruments but with the rocker and the gold pan. Within a short time, some of the richest placer deposits in the world were staked and bringing fortunes to their finders.

Council City stood on a high bank above the Niukluk and was safe from floods and ice jams in the spring. Three or four thousand people overflowed the tiny place and the nearby creeks in that summer of 1901—a settlement so small it could boast a main street two blocks long, and which was really nothing more than a continuation of the trail.

I lived in Council over a year before I even saw the main street. It was a place for women to avoid, and consisted mainly of about fifteen saloons and dance halls, a café, three or four stores, a barber shop and two small hotels, which faced each other from across the street. Luckily, I could make my few purchases at two stores located on the flat below the recording office.

Rowe learned almost at once that I was earning quite a lot of money, and nearly every week he sent someone to me—Barry, Ed, Pop Charles, Uncle Howard, even Old Man Dow—to ask for money in advance on the share the company would receive of my earnings in the fall. I don't know what he had done with the fifteen thousand dollars, but I did know better than to be surprised that he was broke again. I gave his messengers the money, and gladly. It would keep me nearer to a balance with him, and not entail handing him such a lump sum when time for an accounting came.

I hung on, simply waiting for October and the end of our contract. For I felt that now I was on the road to big things.

Chapter Fourteen

THE days began growing short around the middle of August, the nights cold and windy. There would be a great rush of work as the freeze-up neared—miners going out for the winter and presenting their notices for filing—but after that a lull would set in until after the break-up. Judge Ferguson assured me, however, that I could continue with my work through the winter. There would be the task of copying the records into new books and what little routine work trickled into the office. I decided to stay in for the winter—again to forego returning to New York and visiting my mother and my brother.

I had been working on an average of eighteen hours every day and already had earned a large sum of money—as much as I had earned in the same period while working for the men in Nome. But I hadn't the strength of a year before, and felt tired and weak most of the time. I told myself that I would feel better when the rush dropped off. My contract with Rowe would expire in October, and then when all of my earnings were my own, I could buy the supplies with which to build up my health

during the winter, and I could send my mother enough money to relieve her of financial worries.

The cabin I had rented from the marshal had been designed only for summer quarters, and now I would have to find a snug, tight cabin with a wooden floor and roof. I had learned all about sod roofs during my first days in the rented cabin. The rain nearly flooded me out.

I would also have to locate myself nearer to water, which was very difficult to obtain. The river lay about a quarter of a mile from my cabin, and water had to be hauled in buckets. The first day I hired an Eskimo to carry my water for drinking and sanitary purposes. He charged a quarter a bucket, a quarter being the smallest coin in use. But the Eskimo never returned after the first day, and I started carrying the water myself. I learned how very far a quarter mile can be. Distance is relative, like the thousand feet over the two divides. My neighbors learned that I was hauling my own water by hand, and they took over the task. But I couldn't allow this condition to exist. The marshal had rented the cabin at such a low figure simply because the place had a leaky sod roof, a dirt floor, and was far from available water. But the experience taught me what to look for in a new cabin.

I inquired around, and finally located a place about seventy-five feet from the recording office, on the high bank of the Niukluk. The rent was one hundred dollars a month for the one-room cabin, but it had a floor of whip-sawed lumber, and two glass windows, one overlooking the river and the trail across the tundra with the deep, rolling hills in the background, and the other looking out on a tiny side street. I felt that the view from the rear window alone would be worth this figure.

The cabin was made of heavy logs, but had not been too closely built to scale. One wall measured sixteen feet, one seventeen, one thirteen and one fifteen. The logs

needed chinking badly, which the owner said would have to be done at my own expense, but this was a minor item and could be completed by Akpak in a few working days. Inside, there was a double-decker bunk, a table and a Yukon stove. I felt that I could make it over into a comfortable home. Later, a photographer took a picture of it which was printed thousands of times, on calendars, in newspapers and in magazines. The winter's sun hung just above the horizon, and deep snow lay all around the cabin. One cut-line read, "Home, Sweet Home in Alaska."

I rented this cabin, and asked Judge Ferguson to sound out the owner on selling it to me. If I were going to stay in Alaska indefinitely, I needed some place of my own. Rentals were so high that in a year or so they would amount to the same sum as the sale price. There were no taxes on this property, and, to my knowledge at least, a cabin such as this is still untaxed in Alaska.

On September sixth, just as cold weather began bearing down in earnest, I moved into my new home. The chinking had not yet been done.

Snow began falling and ice stood in the water pail each morning. Flat-bottomed boats were hauling winter supplies up the river from Nome at one hundred dollars a ton, and then carrying passengers back to connect at Cheenik with the small steamers that plied between the town and Nome. Daily, from my window in the office or the back window of my cabin, I saw long lines of miners mushing across the tundra trail, packs on their backs, headed for Nome and the outside. The sight roused a pang of longing in my heart—a longing for home. But I stifled it and determined to stick it out until I could return successful.

My contract with Rowe had only a few weeks to run, but so few members of the original company remained with him that we worked out a new agreement. Rowe

The sun takes a peek at Fizzy's Alaskan home on the shortest day of the year



was broke as usual and depending upon his share of my earnings to carry himself and the company through the winter. His planned trip to the outside, to buy machinery, had been called off—another of his plans gone awry.

The amounts which I had been doling out to Barry and Ed and Dow and the others for Rowe during the summer now amounted to a great deal, and I felt that some sort of change in our initial agreement should be made. Rowe came to Council to see me, and agreed that the new people whom he had taken into the company should not profit from my earnings.

His company had found a little gold that summer, but Rowe had spent all of it on the company, and not one cent had been credited to me. But I found Rowe very reasonable, as he was at most times. He decided that since I had received nothing from the company other than my initial train fare and passage and supplies, he would accept only a quarter of my earnings, which he would divide with the old members of the company, then would cancel my contract. It was a decision favorable and fair to both of us. The contract ended, and I was on my own.

In addition to my retaining three-quarters of my earnings, I also retained full title to some claims Spaulding had given me before he went outside the previous fall and some claims which I had staked on my own during the summer. Now, with the contract ended and Rowe no longer obligated to furnish me with food and lodging, it was up to Fannie Ella to make her own way. With only my mother depending upon me, this looked comparatively simple.

In September, Ianier McKee,* an attorney now practicing law in the financial district of lower Manhattan, was going outside for the winter and agreed to deliver a thousand dollars to my mother. There would be no

* Author of the book, *The Land of Nomo*.—J. O.

shortage of money for her this winter—of that I was determined. The thousand dollars would last her several months, then I could send more money out over the ice.

The rush began of the miners going outside for the winter. Location notices and proofs of labor poured in, jamming my desk. I could simply have set them aside, marking them chronologically, and have entered them at my leisure; but most of the departing men wished to take their papers with them, to raise money or sell stock in their claims, and I put in long, hard hours keeping the books as nearly up-to-the-minute as possible. For no papers could be entered until everything filed prior to that time had been recorded in the books. A moment's difference in time might decide the ownership of a claim. And I could not simply leave space for the less urgent entries and enter those of the men who were leaving. Each paper required a different amount of space in the records, and there was no way of judging accurately just which section any given entry might occupy.

The work piled in. My health began failing.

The freeze-up of interior Alaska came around the middle of September. Three-quarters of the population of the Council District now rushed for the outside. In the middle of it, Ed Ferguson and Barry arrived in Council with a load of provisions for Roweburg and a sack of mail for the recording office. They had been seven days on the trail, and had come through a heavy snowstorm, which had soaked the mail.

Barry said that he was spending the winter at Roweburg. Ed was going back to Nome, then would sail for the outside. He had come all the way to Council to say goodby and to tell me of his plans.

"I'm going on my own now," he said. "I've broken off with Rowe, and I'm going to organize a company of my own."

"Have you claims, Ed?" I asked in surprise.

He nodded. "Rowe deeded me some pretty good ones in exchange for my stepping out of the company now and relinquishing my stock there. Now, if you'd like to go in this with me, I can include those claims Spaulding gave you, for your share in the new company."

"What would you do with them?"

"It'll take about twenty-five thousand dollars to work them properly. I'll go to New York, form a company capitalized at a hundred thousand, and sell stock. I'll give you twenty-six thousand shares, and I'll keep twenty-six thousand for myself. Then I'll sell twenty-five thousand at a dollar a share, so we can buy equipment and work the property, and we'll have the balance as reserve stock."

There was everything for me to gain and nothing to lose, as I couldn't work the claims without money.

I agreed to Ed's suggestion. And there was another reason in my mind. Albert had been writing me continually that he wanted to come to Alaska. I had promised him several times that I would find something for him to do. Now if Albert could come back with Ed in the spring, and work at the claims—

"Sure, I'll bring Albert back with me, and we'll put him on salary and make him the superintendent or something like that," agreed Ed.

I deeded my claims over to Ed, and the deal was closed. Then suddenly he became the concerned young doctor. "You aren't feeling very well, are you, Fizzy?"

I admitted that the hard work and long hours had sapped my strength.

"You've got to get out of Alaska, at least for the winter," he said seriously. "I've been watching you all this time, and you're a nervous wreck."

"I'll be all right as soon as the rush is over."

"No you won't. It isn't only the work; it's the improper food and the way you have to live. You're on the verge of a complete breakdown, or I don't know the symptoms when I see them. Another winter in Alaska may kill you."

I laughed. "I couldn't do it. I've got my work and—"

"The work will be here next spring. You have to get a winter of complete rest and good food and freedom from cold and worry. You'd better plan to sail with me."

I saw now how desperately in earnest Ed was. And I recalled the many mornings I had risen with a splitting headache, unable to eat more than a bite, unable to sleep more than a few hours at a time. My weight had again dropped fifteen or twenty pounds.

The commissioner came into the office and Ed broached him on my taking a six or eight months' leave of absence.

"I'm all for it," said the commissioner, nodding soberly. "I've been worried for several weeks over Miss Fitz's health." He looked at me, adding, "Your job will be here when you come back."

I succumbed.

That night I looked carefully in the mirror. My face had become thin and drawn; dark half-moons lay beneath my eyes. Weakness and giddiness constantly held me. A few moments' hard effort left me exhausted. I was glad I had agreed to go outside for the winter.

Ed and I set off on foot, and after a miserable trip we reached Nome. Rowe and his wife were living in the rear of an unoccupied store known as the Frenchman's Place. Three tiny rooms had been made over in the back of the store, while the front, vast and cold and barren, held only a long counter and a wall of empty shelves. In the small rear quarters, Mrs. Rowe was cooking for ten or twelve men who planned on staying in Alaska with Rowe for the winter. I pitied them.

Rowe had drawn nearly all of his share of my earnings during the summer when someone was always coming to Council for anywhere from five to two hundred dollars. I had kept an exact record of all his withdrawals, and now meant to pay him the slight amount still due him under our new agreement—a matter of only two hundred dollars.

Ed arranged passage for me, and I moved in with the Rowes until the ship was to sail.

Rowe complained of a disastrous summer. The season had been exceptionally short, everything had gone wrong, and now he was broke again, with winter just ahead. The thousands he had raised during the summer were gone, but he described the several auxiliary mining companies that he had formed through outside connections. These auxiliaries were subsidiaries of the parent company—the Rowe Mining Company. And through these outside connections, which were backing him, he had received a supply of staple provisions and a small credit accommodation at one of the large stores.

I relented somewhat toward Rowe when I saw him facing another winter only ill-equipped. Though he was a dreamer and continuously led people into trouble, he was a very kindly man at heart, honest and generous to an extreme—when he had anything. And his wife was one of the finest women I have ever met. Her faith in her husband never faltered. Probably the worst that could be said of him was that he lacked good judgment and was consistently inconsistent.

When we gathered around the stove that first night, he had a new and different sort of proposition on which he was working. He approached it in a round-about manner.

“Fizzy, you know of that private telephone line that the Wild Goose had running out from Anvil creek?”

I nodded.

"A thing like that saves hundreds of miles of travel for the company every year," he said.

I admitted as much.

"Remember," he continued, "how often we wished there was a line between Council and Nome—how many times it would have saved us that long trip on foot, and how many lives it would have saved?"

"Yes."

He leaned forward confidentially, in much the same manner he had used when he approached me about accompanying him and the three other boys to Roweburg the previous winter.

"Fizzy, I'm going to let you in on something good."

I had felt it coming and was prepared. "I'm satisfied the way things are. I don't want anything new."

"But this is something entirely different—something you'll want to be a part of—something you've always said you believed in."

"I'm going outside for the winter."

He paused a moment for full emphasis, looked at me soberly, then said dramatically, "Fizzy, that telephone we've all wanted is going to be a reality."

"Telephone? Where?"

"I'm going to string a line between Nome and Council City. Everything is ready—wire, poles, equipment. And I'm offering you a chance to take part in it."

I couldn't down my interest. A telephone! Even the thought thrilled me: A slender line running across a hundred miles of wilderness. The heartbreaking trips it would save. The lives which would not needlessly be lost. If it were only possible—

"Tell me about it."

"I met a man named Boyd, who had a contract with Lucky Baldwin to install telephone equipment between Nome and Council by way of Safety, Solomon, Topkok

and White Mountain, with a branch-off from Topkok to Bluff City. After Boyd signed the contract, and Baldwin's representative left for the outside, Boyd had no cash and no credit to carry on the work. But Baldwin had already sent the equipment; so, rather than lose the equipment, Boyd relet the contract to me."

"Where would I come into the picture?"

Rowe eyed me keenly. "It's like this, Fizzy. We have the equipment, but no money to pay for the labor of installing it. I'll need twenty-five hundred dollars cash to string that line."

"And I'm to furnish the money?"

"It'll be the biggest thing you've ever done in your life."

"You're always selling me on your ideas, but they never have worked out so far."

"Things couldn't go bad on this. Once the line is up, the telephone will make a terrific amount of money." He got out pencil and paper and sought to show me the vast amount of revenue the line would earn even in the winter. "And in the summer, when there are thousands of people here, with money to burn—"

I could see his point, but— "This is one time you can't change my mind. I'm sick, and I've got to go outside and regain my health. Besides," I added, "even if I did lend you the money, there'd be no assurance of its being repaid."

"You couldn't possibly lose on this. It's not like investing in a mine. With this proposition, the equipment is right here. You'd always have that."

"But I can't advance the money and go outside too. I haven't that much. And if the line failed—"

"How could it fail? Just answer me, Fizzy—in this country, which needs a telephone system more than any other place on earth, how could the line fail?"

"What will you be paid for stringing the wire?"

"Ten thousand dollars. This money comes from Baldwin. The first payment is due over the ice by February twentieth."

"And if it doesn't arrive?"

He smiled. "Then the line and all the equipment is ours, to do with as we please."

"What would I get if I advanced the money?"

"A half interest in the profits or a half interest in the line if the payment doesn't come in when it's due."

I tried to argue out of it, but Rowe's old persuasion was there. And, in the end he sold me on staying in the country through another winter and financing the proposed telephone line. Just as he sold stock in his mining enterprises, just as he convinced me I should take that terrible midwinter trip to Roweburg over the summer trail, he sold me again. But not until after many promises and agreements.

First, he promised me ten thousand shares in the Rowe Mining Company—the parent company, not one of the auxiliaries. Next he offered to furnish all my provisions for the winter, and to deliver them at my cabin in Council, and to provide transportation for my return from Nome. In addition, he promised me a round-trip ticket to New York the next fall, with all expenses paid. It looked good and sounded good. But so did everything else of his—when he talked about it.

We drew up a contract, and I signed it, still so blinded by Rowe's words and promises that I didn't even ask to see the agreement he had entered into with Boyd. I didn't remember it until I was on my way back to Council.

Ed objected violently to my entering into further business deals with Rowe, but by now I was as enthusiastic as Rowe himself over the projected line. I spent a good deal of time trying to convince Ed that Rowe had at last

found something at which he could succeed. And I would watch carefully his progress on the line. At the first sign of a slip up, I would take over myself.

Ed argued that my health would break. I argued in turn that this new interest in something to achieve would put new life into me. Nothing Ed could say swayed me. I had signed with Rowe, and I was going through with it.

On October twenty-second, Ed and I walked down to the *Queen*, the steamer on which he was sailing. I gave him some money for my mother. He made a last protest against my staying in for the winter.

"I want to warn you once more that by staying in Alaska another winter, you're flirting with death."

"I'm sorry, Ed. I can't change my mind now."

"But you can still go out."

"I haven't enough money for both."

He shook his head in exasperation. "Why won't you listen to your friends?"

Ed was very young, really charming, and did have a good business head and was highly energetic.

I told him, "Maybe if I lose this money on Rowe, you and I will make up for it with our own company."

"I hope so."

We said goodby, and Ed boarded the *Queen*.

On the seventeenth of November, the Bering Sea froze up and I was locked in for the winter. There could be no backing out now.

I had started building myself up with good food and plenty of rest during my stay in Nome, and bought everything I thought would help me through the long winter in Council. Rowe gave me a good supply of staples, but I added many different kinds of the nicer canned goods and dainties which I could not reasonably expect him to furnish. For my personal comfort, I added the best of flannels, a 9x12 fox skin robe, wool stockings, and many

yards of inexpensive draperies for the cabin in Council.

This winter I would not live almost entirely on canned food. I bought a large supply of frozen fresh meat and frozen fresh vegetables.

There was no bed in the new cabin, and I was undecided whether to bring my feather bed back with me or buy a new bed. In the end I bought a good bed spring and a hair mattress, deciding to build a frame in the corner to hold them. No sleeping in the double-decker bunk for mine!

Meanwhile, the commissioner had driven hurriedly to Nome by dog team, to hire someone to take my place. I told him of my decision to stay in, and promised to report for work within a few days.

He shook his head. "You shouldn't have done it, Miss Fitz. Though I must admit you look a lot better since you've been here in Nome." He smiled. "What changed your mind?"

Briefly, I gave him the details of Rowe's plans.

"A telephone line!" breathed the commissioner almost reverently. "I don't know how many times I've wished for one. I could even have saved myself this trip if we'd had a phone."

"We'll have one now," I promised recklessly.

"You'd better stay on here for awhile. The winter 'll be long, once you come back."

"I'll report as soon as I feel up to the trip."

"By the way, I found out about your cabin. The owner 'll take fifteen hundred for it."

I blinked. The price was steep for such a cabin, even in Alaska. The place would be untenable until the logs were chinked, a task which still remained undone. I had given Rowe the twenty-five hundred dollars, plus the two hundred dollars still due him on his canceled contract. But I

turned fifteen hundred dollars over to the commissioner and told him to close the deal for the cabin. Now I had very little left of the money I had earned during the summer.

During the time I remained in Nome, I had kept a rather doubtful eye on Rowe, who had at once started work on the line. But he tended strictly to business, and had three miles of line erected before I was ready to leave for Council.

A crew of men worked diligently each day, and Rowe stayed close to the camp, doing none of the actual labor, it is true, but exercising good judgment in the handling of the crew.

When I was ready to return to Council, Judge Ferguson had sent word offering to have Akpak come to Nome and pick me up with the dog team, so that I could make the trip in three days and two nights, but Rowe insisted I permit him to live up to his part of our agreement, and pulled a four-horse team from the telephone work, to take me to Council and to haul supplies both for the boys at Roweburg and for me.

After I had sent word via a traveler that I wouldn't need the judge's team, I learned that the horses would take seven days for the trip, hauling two tons of supplies, a thousand pounds of which were mine. I knew that such a trip would likely make me ill, and decided to hire a dog team.

A blizzard swept across the Nome district and isolated us for several days. When the storm ended, there wasn't an idle team available in Nome. Rowe had no dogs, the four-horse team had left, and I was stranded until I could send word to Judge Ferguson that I needed Akpak.

The day after the storm, I saw Whiskers on the street and asked why he was still in Nome.

His yellow old teeth flashed through his mat of dingy beard. "I'm makin' as much money here as I been makin' on the trail."

"Working?"

"No, gambling."

I shook my head and laughed. "At your age!" Then I told him that I was stranded in Nome until I could send for Akpak.

"Don't send for him. I'll take you to Council right away."

"But there isn't a dog in Nome that isn't working."

"I'll take care of that."

He asked where I was stopping, then left me. I returned to the Frenchman's Place and sat in the living quarters with Mrs. Rowe. We became conscious of a rattling of chains and a yelping in the front of the place.

I peered into the barren store. Whiskers was tying something out of sight behind the long, high counter.

He looked up and grinned. "You ain't seen or heard a thing."

During the rest of the day more rattling of chains, some cursing, and considerable howling emanated from the space behind that long, high counter. But, as Whiskers had suggested, I saw not and heard not.

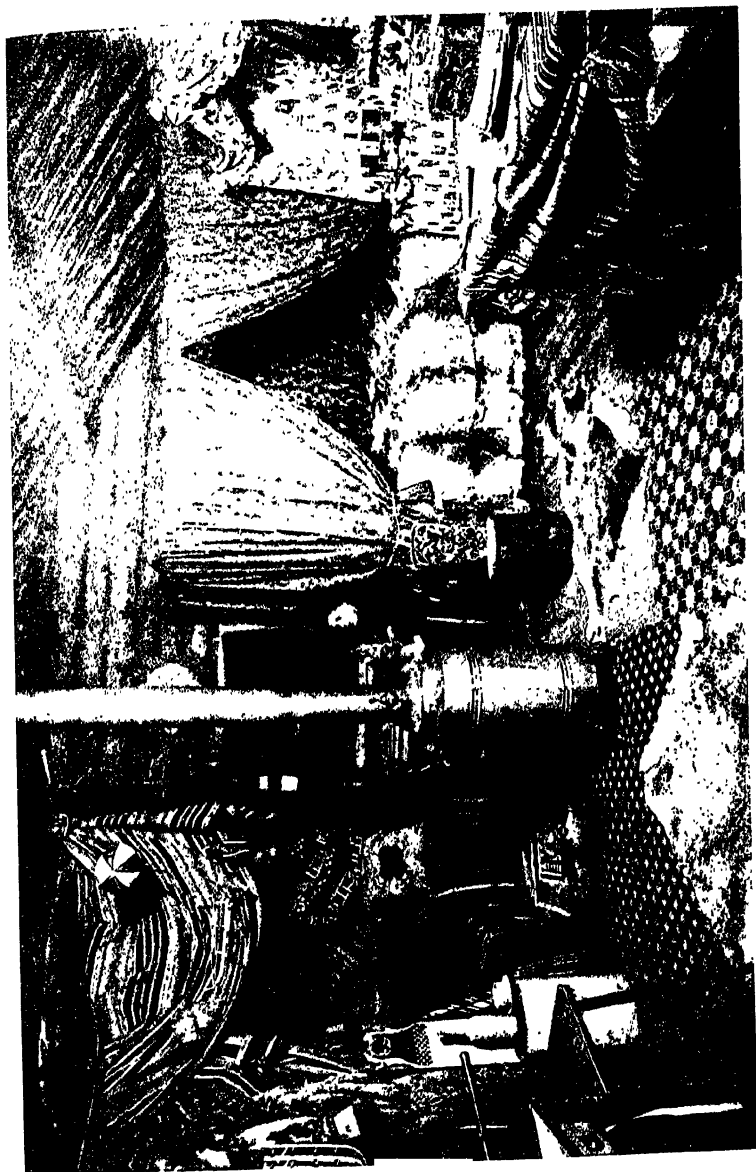
He called for me early the next morning—the morning of November twenty-fifth.

"I'm ready if you are," he said.

"You old thief," I smiled. "You haven't stolen a sled yet."

He grinned. "Didn't need to. An Eskimo friend loaned me a sled. Purtiest thing you ever saw."

He showed me the sled outside the store—a beautiful sled with ivory runners. It must have been the pride of some native's life. And lined up in front of the sled were



Interior of Fizzy's log cabin at Council City

ten sled dogs, each worth at least a hundred and fifty dollars.

I expressed a qualm. "I can't, Whiskers. Those dogs—" "Git in. I'll turn the dogs loose as quick as I git back."

So I climbed into the sled, pulled my fur robe around me, and made the one and only comfortable trip I ever took between Nome and Council. We reached my cabin the evening of November twenty-seventh. Rowe told me later that when Whiskers returned, he released the ten dogs, which streaked immediately to their puzzled owners, and gave the sled back to his Eskimo friend.

Some of my freight had arrived in Council, and I hired two men to put my cabin in livable condition. The logs had to be chinked and the cabin banked. I had bought a heating stove, and a hole had to be cut in the roof for the stove-pipe. As an added precaution, the men lined my sleeping corner with two thicknesses of tar paper, then covered the floor as well, turning the edges up about a foot. They covered the entire tar-papered area with canvas, and I felt that I would be snug and warm for the winter.

The rest of my freight arrived in a few days. The frame for the bed springs and hair mattress had been built, and they fit perfectly. I erected a frame and a dark curtain around the bed, in preparation for the twenty-four hours of daylight which would come in the spring and render sleeping, for me, difficult without shading of some sort.

Though the walls were of rough logs, I covered them with bright blankets, and hung many of my Eskimo curios. A tiny wooden Eskimo boat, suspended from the center of the cabin roof, served both as a lamp and a decoration. Portieres hung with cork and round pieces of tin, which the commissioner salvaged from the saloons, livened the interior. Draped boxes served as a dresser,

with a mirror hanging above it from the wall. The airtight heater stood nearby—a round, flat-topped stove of sheet metal—with the Yukon stove, which I used for cooking, and some boxes which served as cupboards in the farther corner. A flat table in the center of the cabin completed the furnishings.

I had caught up with the work in the office, and there was little to do, for which I was thankful. My eyes had weakened from the strain I had put upon them in the unlighted cabin at Roweburg; and the year of undernourishment had taken its toll. Though I had tried hard to rebuild myself, I was still miserably thin and weighed less than a hundred pounds.

Christmas Eve saw a sinking thermometer, but a white moon lighted the Arctic scene like day. I was marooned in my cabin with Faust and Sport, one of the commissioner's dogs. I made hot chocolate, and ate canned peaches with canned milk as a Christmas Eve dinner. The dogs got crackers.

But I celebrated the arrival of the New Year in no way. I was too busy. For, after the many long months of poverty and struggle, I had at last found the trail which I hoped would lead to the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

ABOUT two weeks before New Year's, the commissioner had called me into his office and outlined a proposition which he thought might enable us to stake land on fabulous Ophir creek.

"A lot of claims are going to be open for relocation because the assessment work for this year hasn't been done," he began. "Some of those claims will be on Ophir, and there's nothing to stop us from staking them ourselves."

"Would it be legal for us to do that?"

"Once the New Year starts, they'll be open to anyone to relocate, and we're as free to restake them as anyone else." He rose from his desk. "Let's look at the records."

We went through the proofs of labor and found that several claims on Ophir would be abandoned by their owners unless they performed their hundred dollars' worth of assessment work before midnight of December thirty-first.

The commissioner looked up at me, nodding. "Do you want to go in this with me?"

"It looks like a good chance. What will we do?"

"First, you make a list of the claims between Discovery and No. 40, on which the assessment work hasn't been done. Then I'll go out to Ophir and look these claims up and see if there's any sign of work having been done this year. I'll make a map of their location and the site of the initial stake. We'll pick out the claims we want and have location notices ready. Then if the proofs of labor haven't been filed when the office closes December thirty-first, we'll restake those claims right after midnight."

"It might not look well if people saw you prowling around those claims, then found out later that we'd staked them."

He stared ahead thoughtfully a moment, rubbing his chin. "That's true. I hadn't thought of that."

"I'll go out and inspect the claims and make the maps," I offered.

"Do you think you can do it?"

I laughed. "After spending a year in the Rowe camp, there isn't much of anything I can't do."

The next few days I spent on Ophir creek with Akpak and the dog team, returning each night and enlarging the map showing the area I had covered. A number of the claims showed that no work had been performed on them that year. There was now so little time left that the full hundred dollars' worth could not be performed unless the owner hired men to do it for him.

I finished the preliminary work, then drew up relocation notices covering the claims we wished to restake.

"You shouldn't be out there doing that restaking at night," said Judge Ferguson. "Either I'd better do it myself, or we'd better hire someone."

"But who could we trust with such information? Nearly anyone around here would be apt to restake the claims for himself."

The commissioner thought this over for a time. Then, "What about that old sourdough who borrowed the sled and stole the dogs to bring you here?"

"That's it!" I cried. "He's just the man."

We dispatched Akpak to Nome, to find Whiskers. They arrived in Council in the bitter cold, just before midnight New Year's Eve.

Whiskers said, "Dog teams and men comin' from every direction. Looks like the whole country's out claim jumpin' tonight."

Quickly we explained what had to be done, then gave him the map and the relocation notices.

Judge Ferguson said, "You'd better stake the most likely looking places first. Here, I'll mark them on the map."

"Don't bother," grinned Whiskers. "I'll stake 'em all."

And he did. Miners swarmed all about the Ophir creek properties, but the old sourdough restaked every claim we had indicated. We gave him a small share in the claims, paid him some cash, and sent him back to Nome with Akpak, where he intended waiting until spring. At that time he would return and help work the claims.

Now we felt that we had staked claims which would yield gold in large quantities. We didn't know why the original stakers had let their titles lapse. Rowe had made the same mistake on Ophir, and so had dozens of others. Perhaps we would now profit on the others' mistakes, as had some of the miners now operating on the creek.

Though the ground was frozen solid, and the snow lay fifteen feet deep, the diggings along Ophir creek hummed with activity. Huge dumps of pay dirt lay on each claim, awaiting the break-up, when this dirt could be run through the sluice boxes, the spring clean-ups made, and everything prepared for the summer's mining. In places, the

snow was burned down fifteen feet to reach the pay streak.

Instead of doing preliminary work on our new claims, the commissioner and I waited for spring. There seemed time enough in which to work the claims.

About the middle of January, a laborer from one of the claims came to the recording office and asked for the record books containing location notices. There was nothing out of the ordinary in this request. The books were always open to the public.

The laborer, whose name I soon learned was John Adams, pored over the books for several hours, saying nothing. I watched him in curiosity, wondering what he found of such interest. At last he closed the books and turned to me.

"I think I've found a small fraction open on Ophir."

I asked, "Can I help you?"

"Well, I can't trace it through the records, but I'm sure it's there. If you'll hunt it up for me and find the boundaries of these other claims, I'll give you a half interest in the fraction."

"Where do you think this fraction is?"

"Between the Last Chance and the Frisco."

They were two of the biggest producers on the Ophir.

I said, "If the fraction's really there, you're overpaying me a great deal in giving me half."

He shook his head. "No, this is a fair enough deal. Without you, I'd never be able to locate the boundaries of the Frisco and the Last Chance, and then I couldn't stake the fraction. Do you really think there's likely to be gold there?"

"It's almost a certainty."

He paused a moment. "If you'll take a chance on me, I'll make you an even better deal. I need some money

right now—five hundred dollars. If you'll lend me five hundred dollars on our chances of finding this fraction, I'll give you half and sell you the other half for three thousand dollars any time between now and next freeze-up."

"And if the fraction doesn't exist, what of my five hundred dollars?"

"You'll lose it."

I didn't know the man very well—had merely seen him from time to time in Council. But it was a good gamble. I gave him the five hundred dollars, and we drew up an agreement, which secured him as far as possible against my staking the fraction for myself alone, and told him to return the next day. Then I set to work tracing the boundaries of the claims on Ophir at the point he had designated.

I found the fraction in a horseshoe of the creek, though more research was required to learn the actual extent of its area. I mapped out the claims already staked, then measured the boundaries described in the location notices. The fraction was a triangular piece of land of eight acres at the bottom curve of the horseshoe.

A claim consisted of twenty acres, which generally measured thirteen hundred and twenty by six hundred and sixty feet. In the horseshoe curve, the locators had been unable to lay out their claims symmetrically, so each claim had been staked irregularly, in an effort to secure the full twenty acres allowed by law. And in this horseshoe, the locators of Ophir creek had overlooked the eight-acre fraction. . . . I knew that it must be of almost inestimable value.

The next day, John Adams, the laborer, staked the Hidden Treasure fraction and gave me a half interest. I then went to the commissioner and told him of our find.

"Couldn't we go through the books," I asked, "then draw a map of the entire creek, and stake any other fractions we might find open?"

He nodded vigorously. "No reason why we can't, and there'll be nothing unethical about it. Anyone could do it, just like your friend John Adams. The books are open to the public."

"Won't the miners here be apt to resent it if we stake claims after using information gathered from this office?"

"Let 'em resent it and be blowed. The same opportunities are open to them."

"I'll start drawing a map of the entire creek from the record books."

The map was a huge thing, fifteen feet long, with each claim drawn to scale, and every twist and turn shown in the creek. The commissioner had once been a surveyor, and we used his professional knowledge in making the map absolutely accurate.

The work on the map occupied many months. There were trips innumerable to the claims along the creek. The break-up was almost at hand before the map was finished, and I had nearly forgotten about the embryo telephone system which I had helped launch. But my troubles in that endeavor still lay ahead, and fortunately did not bother me now.

Then we were ready to start staking the claims—a task which must be done quickly, before the other claim owners along the creek became suspicious, checked the various boundaries, and found unstaked land beside them.

One of our first finds had been a full claim, plus a thousand-foot fraction. This property lay between claims being worked by the Wild Goose Mining Company, which evidently thought the claim and the fraction had been staked and belonged to them. As another barrier, the Wild Goose people were very friendly with the commis-

sioner, and I knew Mr. Lane, the owner of the Wild Goose, quite well.

When I told the commissioner, his face darkened. "The Wild Goose, eh?" He hesitated. "We have as much right to stake that land as anyone, but I hate to have the office mixed up in this, and I'm certainly not simply going to tell them and let them have it for nothing. You'd better send for Whiskers again and let him do the staking for us."

Akpak left at once, but he evidently overstated the urgency of his mission, for Whiskers insisted upon starting back at once for Council, though the time was two in the morning.

They mushed back almost without stop, and reached my office at four A.M. two days later. Rather than disturb me at that hour, Whiskers went into one of the saloons, ostensibly to await my arrival at the office at nine o'clock.

When I came to work, he stumbled in a few moments later, rolling drunk.

I looked at him unbelievably.

"Whiskers, have you been drinking?"

Indignantly he drew himself up. "I've come through cold and snow, and what do you do when I get here? You tell me I'm drunk, that's what you do."

He acted as though he were going to cry. I feared that the staking of those claims would have to be delayed a day.

"But you are drunk, Whiskers; and you know you can't drink on the trail."

"I never drink on the trail," said he solemnly. "I always step off."

"You smell like a saloon."

"I should. I been waitin' around one long enough."

"Do you think you can do some more staking for us?"

"Lead me to it."

He seemed to be all right, now, so I took him to my desk and gave him the papers which I had already prepared in his name.

"Go to No. 32 Ophir, find the initial stakes, and locate a claim thirteen hundred and twenty feet long by six hundred and sixty wide. Here's the location notice—No. 33 Ophir."

"No. 33 Ophir. Who says I'm drunk?"

"I do," I giggled. "Now pay attention." He focused wandering old eyes on me. "From the upper stake of No. 33, measure a thousand feet, six hundred and sixty feet wide, and use this notice—No. 33½, on the initial stake."

He blinked. "A thousand feet? Where's the other three hundred and twenty?"

"This is a fraction. There are only a thousand feet in this claim. Understand?"

He nodded. "I understand. But where's the other three hundred and twenty feet?"

I went over it again and again, trying to drive the instructions into his head. But it was no use. At last, in sheer desperation, I wrote the instructions and put them in his inside pocket with the location notices.

He said, "Fizzy, I gotta li'l confession to make."

I looked up.

He placed a gnarled finger to his lips and half closed an eye. "I'm drunk."

I stifled an impulse to laugh. "All right. I won't tell a soul. But you must promise to keep a secret for me."

"Whashat?"

"You mustn't tell a soul why you're here or what you're going to do. If anyone learns of it, we may lose a fortune."

"Not a word about it." He made extravagant gestures.

"Whiskers, you mustn't. It's our chance to strike it rich."

“Word of honor. Whiskers never talks.”

I called Akpak and told him of the papers in Whiskers' pocket.

“Watch over him,” I warned. “Don't let him have anything more to drink. Take him to the Ophir now, No. 32. When you get there tell him about the papers in his pocket.”

They left me then, with the Eskimo at the handlebars of the sled and Whiskers hanging onto the side, singing in a thin, reedy voice. It was the one time I ever saw the old man drunk. Later he told me that he had sold his interest in the claims he had staked for us New Year's morning. Never before had Alaska brought prosperity to him.

The next two days dragged past fretfully, filled with worry of terrible things. Perhaps Whiskers had continued drinking and— But, no. Akpak didn't drink, and wouldn't allow the old man to drink after I had ordered otherwise. But what if Whiskers lost the papers and someone else found them—if he came out of his alcoholic stupor and failed to understand my written instructions—if he couldn't read—if he babbled our secret to other travelers he might meet on the trail?

These were a few of the fears that beset me while I waited word in Council. Yet the necessity of staking those claims immediately had forced me. Word had got out of the fraction John Adams and I had staked. Almost any moment, the other operators might check their boundary lines, then quickly stake the fractions I had uncovered, before Whiskers could get down his location notices. And the instructions I had given him in writing were so explicit that even the rankest amateur would have little difficulty in locating the claims I described. If Whiskers lost them. . . .

If Whiskers lost them. The words beat against my brain incessantly during those long forty-eight hours.

Then I heard the yelping of dogs racing over the trail and, a few minutes later, the stamping of feet outside the office.

Whiskers entered. "All taken care of, Fizzy."

He tossed the location papers on the desk and signed them. I sighed with relief.

"When you left here, you weren't in very good condition to remember all I told you."

He sat down and opened his coat. "Didn't remember a thing till the cold air hit me at the divide going over into Ophir. That Eskimo lad had me wrapped in a blanket in the sled." He paused, shook his head, and laughed. "The rest was easy. But it sure musta been a swell drunk. Pity a man can't remember all the fun he has."

We drew up papers, and in less than a week, the Wild Goose had bought the claims for thirty thousand dollars, which the commissioner, Whiskers and I split three ways. It was my first big deal in Alaska. Now my mother need worry no longer about the immediate future. And I still had a half interest in the Hidden Treasure, as well as the claims we had restaked on the Ophir New Year's morning.

Socially, I was having a splendid time. Nearly every night someone gave a little party. Occasionally there was a dance in the Arctic Brotherhood Hall. Floyd Cannon, who later founded the immense Clorox Company, played the banjo and furnished music for the dances with a sort of one-man band. A contraption attached to his banjo held a mouth organ. With these two instruments, he furnished sufficient music for our needs. His feet stamped out the rhythm. Occasionally a man from Ophir creek accompanied Floyd on the violin. We enjoyed ourselves, regardless of what sort of music was furnished.

The commissioner was a very heavy man, weighing well over two hundred pounds, but he danced excellently.

One night I was dancing with him on the second floor of the Arctic Brotherhood Hall, when he suddenly clutched me to him and yelled. I felt him growing smaller.

There was a rending of lumber, and the floor broke beneath him. Down he went, yelling at the top of his voice. His plunge toward the ground floor halted at his armpits.

The dance stopped. Everyone rushed near him, shouting advice.

"Stand back!" he yelled. "You'll cave in the whole place!"

Everyone backed away. "What'll we do?"

"Get me out!"

He wriggled tentatively. The boards creaked and crackled ominously.

Everyone burst out laughing, and stood back helplessly. The commissioner roared, his face apoplectic, his eyes bulging.

At last, several of the boys laid planks around him and pulled him to safety. We thought that this accident would cure him of his love for dancing. But such was not the case. Instead, he placed chairs around the hole in the floor and finished the dance that night. But after that, whenever a dance was scheduled, jokesters would first ask him if he were going, before they would commit themselves to attend.

In between these tame but thoroughly enjoyable diversions, we kept intensely busy. There was the work of laying out the huge map exactly to scale, the trips to the creek, and the searchings of the records in our quest for fractions.

By February first, I had interests in so many claims, seventeen of which were on the Ophir, that I opened a set of books to keep track of them. Included in these claims was the Mendocino, which stood at the mouth of the Ophir.

My cabin became crowded with effects I accumulated from time to time, and I bought a big tent which served as a woodshed and storeroom for my coal oil, and was attached directly to the cabin.

Work was slack at the office, so I began the task of transcribing by hand the records from the old book into the new. It was slow, difficult work, for the old records were almost illegible from careless handling. Three hundred pages had to be copied, but I received five hundred and fifty dollars for the task.

The days limped slowly away. I received the letters my mother had written me in November, and which had come in over the ice. She had received all of the money I sent her, and was in no immediate need, but I wished to play safe, and sent her five thousand dollars of my ten thousand dollars profit on the Wild Goose deal.

Ed Ferguson wrote not a line, but I learned through my mother that the new company was starting out successfully. Ed had met a man casually at lunch and had started talking about our claims in Alaska. The man had shown an interest and, in the end, advanced thirty thousand dollars to our company. Ed and my brother Albert would reach Alaska on the first boat after the break-up.

Faust got into a fight about two blocks from the office when five dogs pulling a man on a sled mistook my spaniel for a fox! Suddenly, they tore after Faust, dumping the man into the snow. Faust saw the five howling, chorusing dogs bearing down on him, and started for the office. The dogs raced after him at top speed. Faust turned a corner and dodged past woodpiles and buildings. The sled smashed into these barriers and broke into kindling, but the five dogs came on.

In Faust's hurry, he raced past the office door, which I was holding open, then skidded to a stop and tried to return to me. The five dogs piled on him. Judge Ferguson

vertising for his first issue, written his own copy, set up the type, and locked the forms. He was editor, reporter, advertising solicitor, compositor, pressman and printer's devil all in one. He was a human dynamo of energy. And I might add that John J. Underwood, now the Washington, D. C., representative of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, is still that same dynamic genius who battered the North, single-handed, into submission.

On the following Saturday, March fifteenth, Vol. I, No. 1, came from the little flat-bed press, consisting of six pages, 9x12, and filled with news and advertisements. The Council City *News*, at twenty-five cents a copy or ten dollars a year, became a living, breathing thing. The inhabitants of Council took the paper to their hearts. It was a good friend in a deep and lonely land. Its success was assured from the start.

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A small group of us gathered together evenings and talked or entertained each other—the commissioner; Neville Castle, who was the law partner of Lanier McKee, the attorney who had taken money to my mother in the fall; Charles Phillips, a miner, and his wife; the Floyd Cannons, and one or two others. We were only too glad to admit Jack Underwood to our little circle.

"Why didn't Rowe come and tell me this himself?"

"You know how Rowe is."

Yes, I knew how Rowe was. And I blamed myself as much as Rowe for allowing this condition to arise. I had promised myself and I had promised Ed Ferguson that I would watch Rowe's progress carefully and would take over myself at the first sign of a slip-up. But I had been too interested in acquiring claims on the Ophir. Now Rowe had me in a position where I couldn't simply drop out. The line had to be completed or I'd have only some useless telephone equipment on my hands. My money would be gone.

"I think it'll be all right if you watch him from now on," said Barry. "Even at the rate he's going, he'll have the line completed in time."

I looked at him in amazement. "In time?"

"Sure—by July fifteenth."

"I don't know what—is there a deadline on it?"

"Why, didn't you know? If the line isn't completed by July fifteenth, Rowe loses everything that's been put in it."

I felt my cheeks tingling, my jaw muscles hardening in anger. Rowe had put it over on me again—had led me into a blind alley, from which there was no turning back.

"I'm going back with you," I said. "I have to see Rowe about something."

We borrowed a dog team and started out for Rowe's camp, which was just outside Solomon. The crew was working under a straw boss; Rowe was no place in sight. I learned that he had a cabin in town, and went there. He was stretched out on the bunk.

"Well, Fizzy," smiling his infectious, slow smile, "what brings you here?"

"Why do you want more money?"

He shrugged tiredly. "I miscalculated. The twenty-five hundred was only a drop in the bucket."

"But it's February twenty-first now. Where's the payment that Boyd said was coming in over the ice?"

Rowe grinned triumphantly. "It didn't come. We own the line now."

I felt no surge of joy. "And what will we do with it?"

"Finish it. Clean up a fortune."

"What did you do with the twenty-five hundred I gave you?"

"It just melted away." His grin faded and he eased himself onto the edge of his bunk. "There were lots of unexpected expenses."

"But the wire and poles and equipment were furnished by Lucky Baldwin. All you had to do was pay the men and board them."

He looked up wearily. "It's all gone, Fizzy. I'm sorry. I did the best I could—came about halfway. Now the men will quit if I don't pay them, and the roadhouse keepers are getting insistent."

"But what assurance have I that this thousand you want won't simply be thrown away too?"

"I give you my word. The money will be used only for stringing that wire. And you'll have to believe that the other money went only for that purpose."

"I'm not insinuating anything like that, but there's one thing that bothers me. Why didn't you tell me there was a deadline on this work?"

He looked at me in genuine surprise. "Didn't I tell you?"

"You certainly did not. I was a fool not to have demanded you show me the contract. In fact, I'd like to see it right now."

"It's in Nome," he said lamely.

"Why—have you been borrowing money on it?"

"No. I just left it there for safe-keeping. It's in the bank, and I'll give you a note so you can see it if you wish."

I shrugged that aside. Rowe may have been lax, but he wasn't a liar. I believed then, and I believe now, that he actually thought he had told me all the provisions of the agreement with Boyd. For Rowe became so enthusiastic over each new venture, he was apt to skip important details simply in his excitement of telling about it. And it was this excitement, this enthusiasm, which sold me every time he told me of new schemes.

"What is the penalty if the line isn't completed in time?"

"Why, if it isn't strung by July fifteenth, it reverts back to Boyd."

"Without payment?"

He nodded.

"And we'll lose everything we put in it—my money and your effort?"

"We won't lose anything, Fizzy. Why, I've got all kinds of time. Even working in the winter, we've come halfway. We'll finish it up in jig time. Why, I've already figured out a new proposition I'm going into as soon as the line's done. Maybe you'd be interested in—"

"For heaven's sake, Rowe, stay down to earth, and get this finished before you start dreaming of something else. We've got a telephone system on our hands, and we've got to carry through and complete it or it'll be a complete loss. If anything should happen that the line wasn't completed—" I threw up my hands in despair.

"I wouldn't look at it that way, Fizzy. The line will go through on time. Boyd didn't take advantage of me in insisting on that clause. It was in his contract with Lucky Baldwin."

"I'm not saying anyone took advantage of you. And I'm not insinuating anyone may try later to take advantage of you. But if there were a labor shortage—if someone hired your men away and you couldn't replace them—if you ran out of wire or poles—if anything at all happened to slow up the work so you didn't complete the line by the fifteenth—"

"It'll be all right, Fizzy. There's plenty of wire and poles. I've measured and counted them. And the men won't quit as long as they're paid."

"But they may quit when the mining season opens and they can get bigger wages at the claims."

"Our wire will be strung by that time."

I said grudgingly, "Let's hope so," and gave him the thousand dollars—also grudgingly.

"You have me in a position where I can't do anything but try to save what I've already given you," I added. "But I want you to know that I don't think I'm being treated fairly."

"I'm not trying to cheat you, Fizzy. I'll give you a deed for a half interest in the line right now."

"Bill Rowe, if you want me to follow this through to the end, you'll give me a deed to the entire line, and I'll give you back one-half of the net profit." I paused. "Though I don't know what we'll do with it once it's completed."

"I'm willing to do anything that's fair. I want to protect you all I can."

My heart melted as usual. Rowe was lax and gullible, but honest. Never during the years I knew him did he deliberately and knowingly cheat anyone. He was too willing to trust the other person.

We drew up new papers, making me the sole owner of the telephone line and guaranteeing Rowe his interest. It may have been poor business on my part—this throwing

of good money after bad, but the line was now ours—had been forfeited by Lucky Baldwin and Boyd. The thousand dollars was simply another bet on my part that when the line was completed we could make a success of it. I told myself that from then on my eyes would be on that wire-stringing work.

Alone, I hurried back to Council City.

I reached the office just as a thin, wiry little woman of middle age and nondescript features was entering the door. She was obviously an outsider, and had just bucked the trail all the way from Nome.

Judge Ferguson came from his office to meet her. She asked directions to get to her husband, whom I'll call Fred Nielsen, the operator of a rich claim on Ophir creek.

The commissioner hemmed and hawed. Nielsen was a good friend and had stayed inside all winter, to take advantage of a winter dump and an early spring start. The months ahead had evidently looked long and lonesome. Consequently, Nielsen had prevailed upon an attractive young woman—one of the demimonde of Council City—to come to the claim and live there with him until the break-up. Winter in Council was apt to be monotonous, so the girl had accepted. One of her friends had come along as a companion and had set up housekeeping with the owner of an adjoining claim. And now Nielsen's wife, who was to have waited in Nome until the break-up, was on her way to her husband.

The commissioner's mind worked fast.

"Just sit down, Mrs. Nielsen. I was out on Ophir only a few days ago, and your husband spoke of his loneliness for you."

Mrs. Nielsen's leathery, dried face flushed.

"Fred's a good man, but he needs a woman to cook for him and care for him during the winter."

Judge Ferguson choked. "You just have some hot coffee and rest. It will be a little time before I can get a team together to take you out to Ophir. All the dogs are in use right now, but I'll be able to scare up a team in a little while."

He bowed himself from the office with, "Miss Fitz will be glad to take care of you."

Yes, Miss Fitz would be glad to take care of her.

I rushed about, fixing coffee and something to eat, while Mrs. Nielsen told me of her husband's virtues, his probable loneliness, his helplessness without a woman's understanding hand.

In a couple of hours, the commissioner returned, looking very smug and self-satisfied.

"Sorry I was so long," he explained. "There weren't many dogs in town that weren't working."

He led her outside, tucked her into the sled, wrapped furs around her, and sent her off with Akpak at the handlebars.

"You old hypocrite," I grinned. "Who'd you send ahead to warn Nielsen?"

"I, a hypocrite? Why, Miss Fitz!"

I laughed and turned back to my work. "I'd like to have seen Nielsen's face if his wife had walked in on him and that blonde."

Some time later, the blonde came to the office and thanked the commissioner.

"We passed the wife and Akpak on the way in," she said.

As she was leaving, I asked, "Who came out to warn you?"

"Old Whiskers," she smiled. "He's taking me on to Nome now."

That ended Nielsen's indiscretions temporarily, but a

year later when he again strayed to greener pastures, the climax was not so happy.

He and his wife were stopping at one of the small hotels which had sprung up in Council. Nielsen had been on the claim most of the winter and had come in to meet his wife. Together they were to return to the diggings.

Nielsen had again been sharing his cabin with a local *femme de joie*, and had got rid of her before the arrival of his wife in Council. But the girl, instead of going on to Nome, had remained in town. Nielsen was reputedly quite wealthy, and perhaps the girl intended to cash in on her experience with him.

At any rate, she approached Nielsen in the office of the small hotel, got into a noisy argument, and was overheard by a number of people who were jealous of Nielsen's success and wished to harm him. As a result, his wife heard of the affair.

A loud quarrel broke out in the room when he returned to his wife. The proprietor of the hotel, an immense fat man, started up the stairs to quiet the battling couple.

Just as he reached the top, the door flew open and Nielsen, a very small man, jumped for the stairs.

Mrs. Nielsen rushed after him, carrying a .38 revolver in her hand.

"I'll teach you to travel with other women!" she screamed.

The gun boomed three times. Bullets thudded through the wooden walls.

Nielsen, unharmed, scurried in front of the great form of the proprietor, who had started a hasty retreat down the narrow stairs.

"Don't shoot no more, Mrs. Nielsen!" yelled the proprietor. "You'll hit me!"

They got to the ground floor, and the husband sped to

safety at one of the bars. For a number of days he remained in hiding. At last, the commissioner, acting as arbiter, settled the quarrel by convincing the erring husband that his best step was to deed all his property over to his enraged wife. So far as I know, Nielsen never misstepped again.

Chapter Sixteen

I PAID a three-day visit to the headquarters of the Wild Goose Mining Company on Ophir creek, where I met the manager, Frank Shaw, and learned the principles of placer mining. I might mention in passing that placer mining is not necessarily confined to panning, as many people think, but encompasses any type of mining where the deposits are washed for valuable minerals. The opposite of placer mining is quartz mining, where the mineral is dug from the ground, usually by means of tunnels, sometimes by open-pit mines.

Mr. Shaw assured me of cooperation in any mining venture I wished to undertake, and showed an interest in some of the claims I now held. I secretly hoped to sell some of my properties to him.

When I returned to Council, I found that the town was growing up; during my absence a weekly newspaper had come into being—the *Council City News*, John J. Underwood, Editor. He had arrived the same day I left for the Wild Goose, and had set up shop in a cabin which stood between my place and the recording office. Already, he had installed his little hand-press, solicited enough ad-

vertising for his first issue, written his own copy, set up the type, and locked the forms. He was editor, reporter, advertising solicitor, compositor, pressman and printer's devil all in one. He was a human dynamo of energy. And I might add that John J. Underwood, now the Washington, D. C., representative of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, is still that same dynamic genius who battered the North, single-handed, into submission.

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The winter passed slowly without further word from Rowe. He was his normal self, sending no reports and making no explanation of where my money was going or how the work was progressing. But I did receive reports through Barry or Forsythe, both of whom were working on the construction, and who would make trips to Council at Rowe's behest and ask for additional sums, which ranged from a hundred dollars to five hundred. The work was progressing satisfactorily. The men were being paid, and the roadhouse bills kept from going past due. The line would be finished well within the time limit if the work kept on as it was at present.

The commissioner and the marshal made a trip to Nome and were gone four weeks. During this time, a terrible storm arose. The wind roared around my cabin for three days, and I was storm-bound—didn't even attempt to go to the office. But when the storm ended, and I tried to open the cabin door, I found I couldn't get out. The weight of the snow had broken the ridge pole of the big tent I used as a woodshed and had jammed the door shut. There was no getting out of the windows; in places the drifts were thirty feet deep. My little cabin was completely buried. Later, I learned that it couldn't even be seen from the trail, and was located by smoke rising from a hole in the snow.

The day passed without anyone coming to help me. Night went by, and part of another day. I didn't fear starvation, for I had a good supply of basic staples, but I did wonder just how long I must wait before I was missed.

At noon the next day, I heard voices through the blanket of snow, then the sound of shovels scraping. I cried out to the men.

The cabin door at last flung open, and Floyd Cannon

and Charlie Phillips stood in a long tunnel through the snow.

We laughed and rejoiced that no damage had been done other than to my ridge pole. It had been the worst storm in years. We expressed fear for the poor travelers who had been caught on the trail.

Floyd Cannon said, "We didn't have the slightest idea you were trapped, Fizzy."

"Didn't anyone miss me at the office?"

"Yes, but we thought you just weren't coming to work in that weather."

Some of the travelers didn't fare as fortunately as I. The marshal returned alone to Council just after the storm, traveling by rented dog team, for the commissioner had retained the marshal's team in Nome. Word filtered in of a frozen body in Death Valley. The marshal's duty was to set out immediately and bring in the body.

Dogs were scarce in Council at this time, but one of the commissioner's office pets, a short-haired mixed breed dog, was lazing about. This was Sport, the dog which had spent Christmas Eve with Faust and me. This dog should never have been brought to Alaska. I cannot recall ever having seen him when he wasn't shivering. But the commissioner had come across Sport and his mate, Roxine, a short-haired brindle, one day while they were hauling heavy loads of driftwood, and his kind-heartedness had run away with him. He had paid three hundred dollars simply to give the unhappy animals a home, for they were utterly unfit for work in the cold, and would run and hide when they heard the sound of bells on a harness.

The commissioner had no use for the dogs. The marshal's team was always at his disposal. So Sport and Roxine spent most of their time lying around the office.

But now the commissioner was in Nome with the marshal's team, and the officer had to bring in the body of the dead man. Sport, along with some huskies, was selected, in the making up of a team. I thought it criminal to take that dog into Death Valley.

The place got its name because nearly every traveler who was caught in the valley during a blizzard lost his life. The valley lay at the head of the Tubutulic river and across the divide from the head of the Fish river. It was sixteen miles across and contained no timber. Once a blizzard started across this expanse, a lone traveler knew that death waited not very far ahead.

The marshal, accompanied by a deputy, found the body, lashed it to the sled, and started back to Council City. After a time, snow began falling. The wind rose. Soon they were in the midst of another blizzard, with death waiting to claim them, as it had claimed the man whose body occupied the sled.

The temperature dropped, but they plunged on in the blinding storm.

Then Sport started to lag. This slowed them down considerably. The marshal examined the dog and found that he was suffering intensely from the bitter cold. But nothing could be done.

They pushed on. At last Sport could move no farther, and came to a stop. By the time they touched him, he was stiff, frozen.

The cold was so great that they could not remove him from the harness. By removing their mitts, they would have frozen their hands. So they unsnapped him from the team and, to save the harness, tossed Sport on top of the body in the sled.

Fortunately, the men had covered most of Death Valley before the storm broke about them in full force. They made timber, threw old Sport off, put up canvas for pro-

tection, and started a fire. The heat of the flames evidently reached Sport, for while the men were eating their supper, the supposedly dead dog dragged himself toward the fire, whimpering in pain or fear.

The men had a tender spot in their hearts for Sport, as did everyone else in Council City. They made him as comfortable as possible, and gave him warm food. Sport, though he was only a short-haired mutt, had the respect as well as the liking of every musher who knew him. Sport disliked working as a sled dog, but when he was put in harness, he pulled as well as any husky in Alaska.

The next day the marshal and his deputy reached Council City. By now, the commissioner had returned from Nome and learned what had happened to his dog. I volunteered to care for Sport.

For weeks I doctored him. Parts of his chest sloughed off. Pain tore at him continually. One tooth bothered him, and he would howl in anguish. To help this, I opened it and stuffed it with cotton. This brought him relief.

In the end, Sport pulled through all right, and Faust had his chum to play with. But Judge Ferguson never again would permit Sport to be placed in harness.

About this time, Roxine, Sport's mate, had a litter of twelve puppies. Roxine had been out with Sport on a previous trip and had frozen her breasts. Now it was impossible for her babies to feed, and they had to be taken from her. For some reason she seemed to believe me responsible for the loss of the puppies, and haunted my cabin. She would crawl on the floor on her stomach, looking up at me and whining. But I could do nothing. The puppies had all been given to different people, but each dog had died.

The winter was hard and disastrous for the people of Alaska. Story after story, telling of death on the trail, came to Council City. Four men started across the ice

with mail for the outside. They encountered a storm which kept them snowbound for four weeks. They ran out of food, much the same as we had during our disastrous first trip to Council City. In the face of starvation, they killed one of their dogs and ate it. Another dog died and was immediately torn apart by his famished companions. All of the men became snowblind, but struggled on. Then one of them became seriously ill, which forced a stop. The man became sicker each day, and at last died. After his death, they pushed off again, for civilization. At last, an Eskimo found them and led them to safety. All were badly frozen. Parts of their hands and feet had to be amputated.

One of the Nome newspapermen took a trip into the interior to get a story on a new gold strike. A storm overtook him. He became lost, and froze both hands and feet before he was found. In an effort to save him, the doctors of Nome amputated his hands and feet, but he died within a few weeks.

Men staggered into Council City with fingers blown off by faulty guns, with hands and feet frozen. Amputations were a common occurrence. Many bodies lay beneath the winter snows, along the trail, waiting for the break-up to reveal them.

A man who planned to come to Council City for the Christmas Day party given by the Arctic Brotherhood started on the fifteen-mile trip to town. From my desk, I saw his dog hurry along the tundra trail, deep in snow and frozen solid. I should have realized that this was highly unusual, but I paid the dog no heed—did not in fact give it a second thought even when I saw the dog go back over the trail alone.

The next day I saw the dog again hurrying over the trail toward town, and belatedly realized that something

was wrong. I told the commissioner, who, with several other men, followed the dog back over the trail.

They found the dog's master where the cold had felled him. The dog took up a stand beside his master and refused to allow anyone to approach the body. At last they lassoed the snarling, snapping, threatening dog, and got the body into Council, where they thawed a hole in the ground and buried the man. The dog refused to leave the grave. Many of the inhabitants tried to coax the dog with food, but it stayed on guard, refusing to eat, and died of exposure in a few days.

John Bower was running his "hot air wagon" between Nome and Council—a large covered wagon which traveled on runners in the winter and wheels in the summer, and was heated, during cold weather, with an oil heater. The hot air wagon was known as the Nome-Council stage, carrying mail, which was sometimes three months old, and passengers. Though Bower's rig was more comfortable in the winter than travel by dog team, there was always great uncertainty over departure time. Either the rig had just turned over and caught fire and was out of service until it could be repaired, or Bower was sitting around, smoking idly, while his passengers fidgeted helplessly. For some reason which he never made known, he always kept the passengers waiting until after midnight, though he could have set out at any time. The trip was made without overnight stops, and consumed two days and two nights; but Bower's midnight loafing forced the weary passengers to sit up an additional night.

The hot air wagon was utterly unsuitable for travel in so barren and rough a country. Top-heavy and undependable on the trail, it was continually tipping over and catching fire. Somehow the passengers and Bower always managed to escape any serious injury, and as a

rule the damage done by the fire was repaired within a week or ten days.

One night in April a great shouting arose from the tundra. Silence was a sacred rule on the trail, and was never broken unless someone had fallen into serious trouble. Consequently, the noise roused everyone in town, and we rushed outdoors.

Bower, half frozen, mushed across the tundra. His rig had upset again and caught fire a few miles outside Council. This time it had burned entirely. There were no passengers, but Bower had been trapped and had barely escaped.

We thought, then, that Council was growing so old that one of its pioneer institutions had passed forever, but Bower built a new wagon and was back in service in a few months. But in the meantime, we were even further isolated from the outside world. Previously he had brought us not only news and mail from Nome but also unfrozen potatoes and onions, which we eagerly welcomed, even at fifteen and thirty dollars a hundred pounds, respectively.

The time slipped past without further word from Rowe. But it caused me no serious apprehensions. That was his way. I had told myself all along that I would get down to the telephone camp as soon as possible—as soon as I felt physically able to make the hard trip, which would necessarily be made by dog team since the hot air wagon had burned. But I delayed too long.

Water started running in the Niukluk river and some of the creeks May sixth. The break-up came the twentieth. This shut us off from all but the immediate vicinity for several weeks.

At last the floods subsided, and the trails dried. Then the mail came in. The first letter was from Rowe. He was in serious trouble over the line and needed me right away. Another letter was from my brother, who had ar-

made, and disappeared. Seemingly I had hired him just as his period of good behavior was coming to an end. Father Devine came to Council and put me through a course in handsetting type, job work, writing news stories, laying out and making up ads, and editing a paper. For a time, he wrote, without a by-line, most of my copy. The Seattle and Nome papers copied it and complimented me on my ability! The Father had been an expert newspaperman before he went into the priesthood. I never gave him away. For a time, I got the paper out alone, even turning the press. Then I hired C. B. Heizer, who remained with me as long as I published the paper.

When the break-up came, I was waiting in Nome, ahead of the floods which would isolate Council for several weeks. Albert landed, full of news of his contest with his publisher. As I expected, things went badly for my brother. In the end Albert received less than five hundred dollars, after paying his attorneys.

The machinery and the factory man arrived on a later vessel. I got the thirty thousand from Baker, paid the attached bill of lading, and ordered the equipment moved to the claims. There was nothing to keep me from devoting all my energy to the new endeavor. I had given up my position in the recording office.

While I waited for the machinery to start for the Ophir, I inquired into the success of the telephone system. About a hundred and fifty people in Nome had phones, with more being installed all the time. The system was an assured success from the beginning. Later I learned that the operators sold stock, and this stock paid twenty-five per cent on the dollar in the first year! But only temporarily did I bemoan the luck which had ousted me from the line. I was on the trail of something even bigger.

After paying the bill of lading, the enormous freight bill to Ophir, and other incidentals, I had only about

Nome. Nobody has the slightest idea where there's even a foot."

This was June. The line had to be completed by July fifteenth or it would revert back to Boyd. There was plenty of time to do the task, but the wire shortage would not excuse us for failing to complete the contract. I set out on the horse for Nome.

My predicament dampened somewhat my reunion with my brother and Ed, whom I found camped about four miles east of Nome with Old Man Dow and a newcomer, Charlie Smith, from New York. I told them of the shortage.

"That ought to be easy to fix," said Ed.

"Rowe claims there isn't an extra foot of wire in this part of the country."

"Well, he's consistent, if nothing else," grinned Ed.

"What do you mean?"

"He's always wrong."

"You know where there's some wire?"

Ed nodded. "The Wild Goose had a private telephone line running up to a side creek from Anvil. Those claims are worked out, and if they haven't strung the wire someplace else, we can probably get it."

Albert said, "You'd better get going."

We left him there, to supervise the camp he and Ed had opened, and Ed accompanied me to Nome, where we delivered the horse. Then we rented two horses and rode out to the Wild Goose on Anvil. Neither of us knew the man in charge, but I told him of the trouble confronting Rowe and me.

"I've got four or five miles of wire, all right," he admitted. "But it's old wire running to a worked-out claim, and I haven't the authority to tear it down or let anyone have it."

"I know your president, Mr. Lane, very well," I said,

"and I'm sure he'd let me have the wire if he were here."

"Mr. Lane's in the States."

"I know. And if our telephone line were completed, we could phone Frank Shaw, the manager of your Ophir creek property, and get his approval. But without your wire, we can't complete our line."

"I'm sorry. If I had the authority I'd let you have it."

"But you have no use for it. The wire's simply lying idle on your poles and rotting."

"Look," said Ed. "I tell you what we'll do—" he looked at me "—if it's all right with Miss Fitz." I nodded. "If you'll lend Miss Fitz the wire, she'll order an equal amount of new wire for you from Seattle, and it'll be here in less than a month."

The proposition interested the man, but more promises and explanations were needed. But he was weakening, and in the end gave in.

"All right. I'll lend you the wire, but you've got to pay the cost of my men taking it down."

I arranged for the wire to be sent to Rowe's camp, then turned to acquainting my brother with the country and the people of the land he had chosen to visit.

Albert was none too strong a man, and not entirely fitted for the rigorous Alaskan life. But I was getting ahead rapidly, and knew influential men of the country, and thought I could find something for him to do or arrange something which could keep him happy until I started mining on my own and could place him in charge there.

I told him of the new paper which Jack Underwood had started in Council.

"That's what I'd like," he said boyishly, his eyes shining. "I've always wanted to be a newspaperman."

I laughed at him and his eagerness, but his words set me to thinking. Every boy at some time or other wanted

to be a newspaperman. And some of those boys actually became good newspapermen. Perhaps Albert would be a success in that line. He was a writer of song lyrics—a writer with a flair for catchy words and phrases. He had tried his hand at writing, and had not fared too badly.

“I’ll see Jack Underwood when I get back to Council. Maybe he’ll sell out. Then you could handle the business end, and we could hire a printer to set the type and make up the paper.”

“I could learn that too, and handle it all myself.”

“You’d better stay on here with Ed until fall. I don’t think Mr. Underwood would be very interested in leaving before the freeze-up. And Ed will need you here anyway.”

Ed was busy with young Smith in readying the property I had turned over to them and the claims which Ed had staked. Smith had invested a large amount in the company—he was the man whom Ed had met at luncheon and interested in the venture—and looked forward to cleaning up a fortune. I might add that both the boys and Albert worked hard all summer, but the enterprise failed. They found little gold.

I had spent several days in Nome, and now felt that I must get back. First, there was a stop to be made at Rowe’s camp; then I had to return to my work in Council, which was piling up terribly. Ed worried about my returning alone to Council—still harped on my health—and hired two horses and made the trip with me.

When we reached Rowe’s camp, the wire had arrived, but Rowe was broke as usual and badly in need of money for his clamoring employes.

I gave him the money to pay his men. There was nothing else I could do. So far as I could see, Rowe simply had miscalculated the amount of money needed to erect the line in the first place. And there was at least one

bright spot in this dark venture: ample time remained for the completion of the line. At least, the work would not be performed for nothing.

Ed and I left Rowe gazing starry-eyed into space, probably dreaming of the great profits which lay just ahead. Plans for big things—newer and bigger—were stirring within him again.

Ed returned to Nome with the horses, and I plunged into my work at the office. The commissioner had been busy prospecting the claims which we had staked. Most of them proved of too little value to warrant investing a hundred dollars in assessment work each, and we let them drop.

By now, I had so many irons in the fire that I couldn't possibly go outside for the winter. I would have to stick it out again. But this time I would send to the States for my winter supplies.

The order I sent outside amounted to six hundred dollars, and I don't think I omitted anything I had ever before eaten and enjoyed. A man dug a hole under my floor, in which I could store potatoes without their freezing. Once more I was ready for the winter, though the freeze-up still lay more than two months ahead.

On July third, Rowe had completed the line so far that he moved his camp into Council. Only twelve days remained before the contract expired, but there were less than eight miles of wire to be strung. But Rowe came to my office with more bad news.

"It looks as though we're going to run short of poles," he muttered.

"Poles! You said you counted them, and there were enough."

"I did, but they've been disappearing."

"How could they?"

"Well, if somebody found it to his advantage, he might

have rolled a few into the river each night while we were asleep."

"You mean you suspect somebody's bucking us?"

He shrugged. "The wire was short, too, Fizzy."

I asked, "How many poles will you need?"

"Two hundred—maybe two fifty."

"Then your men will have to cut spruce poles to tide us over till we can have others shipped in."

"These trees around here aren't big enough."

"It doesn't matter; they'll have to do."

"I haven't enough men, Fizzy. And you know what chance I have of hiring anybody at this time of year."

"Then you go out with all of your men but one and cut poles. I'll get hold of somebody else, and your man can show us how to set those poles, which shouldn't be hard since they'll be small. Then you can quickly string the wire after the poles are cut."

We settled it that way and went into a week of desperate activity. I explained to the commissioner, who agreed that the work at the office could slide during this crisis, and delegated Akpak to help me.

Rowe went into the woods to fell spruce trees, leaving us one experienced man. We set the poles as fast as they came to us, and by the time the last was up, and Council had been reached, Rowe still had several days in which to string the remaining wire.

He sailed through easily, and the line was completed July fourteenth. I didn't know just what we were going to do with it, and Rowe went back to Nome, figuring deep transactions. My dream of wealth was yet unrealized. The telephone system might, in the dim and distant future, make a fortune, as Rowe dreamed; but for the present it was up to my claims on the Ophir and the adjoining streams.

Akpak fell ill of pneumonia and died within a few days. He was just a boy—only eighteen years old. His death saddened me greatly, and I gathered bags of wild flowers and greens for floral pieces for his funeral, which was held in the Presbyterian church. There was neither soloist nor organ. Akpak had always loved music, and we couldn't think of burying him without a song of some sort. Then one of the girls from the Totem Saloon—a girl whom I'll call Mary—volunteered her services and sang the funeral song. It was a strange circumstance—this girl from the unmentionable singing in the church. Akpak's death was the first from natural causes in the history of that section.

I was to see and hear more of Mary in the near future. The commissioner told me that he was trying an interesting case the next day, and suggested I sit behind the drapes of his office and listen to the testimony. As usual, court was to be held in my office.

The defendant was Frank the Freighter, a man who hauled freight between Golofnin and Council on horse-drawn river scows. The plaintiffs were Mary and Martha, both of whom worked in the Totem Saloon. Mary was known as Frank the Freighter's girl. Some sort of bond existed between the girl and Martha, who was considerably older.

Early one morning in June, Mary had fallen in the Totem and hurt herself badly. Some said she was drunk, but it didn't matter. Among the girls of her class drunkenness was the common thing. There were no facilities for hospitalization in Council, so Mary was carried to Frank's cabin, where a local physician attended her and sent for a woman to nurse her.

Frank offered no objection to this, and paid the woman thirty dollars a day for her services. At the end of a week,

Frank paid her off. Martha then stopped work at the Totem Saloon, moved into Frank's cabin, and cared for Mary for several weeks.

Now Martha was suing Frank for about two hundred dollars for caring for Mary. Frank was contesting the case. In my office were Judge Ferguson, Mary, Martha, Frank and two attorneys.

Frank didn't deny that he had sanctioned hiring the other nurse and that he had paid her thirty dollars a day for her services. Nor did he deny that he had paid other bills of Mary's. That was all admitted, but he still stubbornly refused to pay Martha's bill.

Her attorney argued that ten dollars a day was a very nominal sum—that she had given up her work in the saloon, where she had been earning much more each night—and that Frank should now pay her. This he continued to refuse to do, but would offer no explanation and would give no reason.

The case was argued back and forth for an hour. Then Frank's attorney started questioning Martha.

"How long have you known Mary?"

The answer was a shrug of the shoulders. Law in Alaska in those days differed vastly from that which is dealt out now.

"Is there any good reason that you should charge for taking care of her?"

"I gave up my work at the Totem."

"But isn't there an even better reason that should have impelled you to take care of her for nothing?"

Again that shrug of the shoulders.

"I want more than a shrug." He lowered his voice.

"Tell me this: what relation is Mary to you?"

She stared at the attorney without answering.

"Answer me," he insisted.

Still Martha refused to talk.

The attorney appealed to Judge Ferguson. The judge strummed the desk. "If you can answer that question, you must do so."

In a low, cracked voice, Martha muttered, "She's my daughter."

For a moment there was complete silence. Then Frank's attorney demanded that the case be dismissed on the ground that a mother should take care of her own daughter.

But Martha then asked if she could tell her story. The judge nodded.

"Our home was in Portland," she began, her voice gaining in strength as she spoke. "My husband was superintendent of one of the railroads there. Mary was our only child. We had quite a bit of money, and Mary graduated from Vassar. But my husband suffered from melancholia, and finally committed suicide. That was the beginning of the end.

"Mary fell in love with a worthless man at the time of the Klondike strike. He left her with the promise that he would either be back or would send for her. He did send for her, and she went to him.

"Several years passed, and I heard nothing at all from them. I wrote, but the letters were unanswered. At last I could stand the suspense no longer and sold some of my jewelry to get to the town in the Klondike where she had gone. Here I found them living together. They had two children, and they were not married."

Martha paused and looked thoughtfully at the floor. I wondered if the lust for money could bring a mother to expose her daughter in this fashion. Then the voice went on.

"About this time, word reached us of the Nome rush. The man talked me into returning to Oregon and raising money on the last of my jewels and other things so he

could get to Nome. Mary was to follow him later, bringing the children. Then they would be married.

"I made the trip to Portland and brought back the money for him. At the appointed time, Mary went to meet him with the children, and I returned once more to Oregon.

"I heard nothing more from Mary. There were no answers to my letters, and I began to be afraid for her and the children. Finally I got what money I could together and took the steamer to Nome. There I found Mary selling drinks in one of the saloons and the children loose on the streets.

"Mary told me that when she reached Nome she couldn't find the man. Her money had quickly run out, and she had been forced to take the only sort of work available.

"I begged her to take the children and return with me to Portland, but she refused. After considerable pleading, she agreed at last to let me take the children back.

"I returned to Portland again, found a good home for the children, where I boarded them, and then I came back to Nome, to try again to persuade Mary to give up the life she was leading. But by now she had left Nome. I traced her as best I could and at last located her working here in Council City. Once more she was working in a saloon.

"By now my money was all gone. I couldn't even get back to Portland, and if I didn't earn money, the children would suffer. So I started selling drinks side by side with my daughter, trying all the time to convince her to return with me as soon as we had money."

She paused and looked up for the first time at the judge.

"Now all I earn goes for the care of the children in Portland. I gave up my earnings in the Totem to nurse

Mary. If Frank doesn't pay me, I'll have no money to send for the children's board."

Her story was enough for the kind-hearted commissioner, who had once paid three hundred dollars for two suffering dogs. He decided against Frank the Freighter, who paid promptly.

Frank held no resentment toward Martha for taking him into court. He felt that the matter needed legal settlement, and when the decision went against him, he simply paid and forgot about it. Later, he married the girl, and sent Martha back to Portland to care for his wife's illegitimate children.

Rowe had supposedly been working in Nome, soliciting subscribers for telephone service. I had been occupied similarly in Council during the few moments I could spare. And from my observations, success seemed assured for the line, once it started operation. Everyone would back it; everyone would have great need for it. We decided that since Jack Underwood slept, worked and ate in his office, the line would terminate there, where twenty-four-hour service would be assured. I began to hope that I would actually not only regain the money I had put into the line but might even profit considerably from it.

About this time, Rowe came to the recording office in Council, his face long and serious.

"Well, Fizzy—Boyd's taking up his option on the line."

I looked at him without understanding. "His option on— What are you talking about?"

"That option I gave him. He's buying back the line for the ten thousand dollars."

"You gave him an option?"

"Yes—but don't tell me I hadn't told you about it!"

I felt my strength drain from me. "Bill Rowe, you

never gave me the slightest inkling Boyd had an option to buy back the line if he lost it."

Rowe's face reddened. "Gosh, I could swear I explained it to you when you gave me the twenty-five hundred."

I asked wearily, "Just where do we stand now?"


"Well, Boyd had this option, which gave him until September first to buy back the line, in case he missed the payments and lost it. He has the ten thousand dollars now and is taking over the line."

"In other words, I risked all my money and you put in all that work when there wasn't a chance of our profiting, even though you completed the line on time?" I stared at Rowe in disbelief. "I financed the line and you performed all the work, and our only reward for finishing the construction on time is to get my money back."

Rowe muttered "I'm sorry, Fizzy. I didn't think Boyd would ever raise ten thousand." *

* The line erected at great risk and almost without profit by Miss Fitz and Mr. Rowe is now part of the Alaska Telephone and Telegraph Company.—J. O.

Chapter Seventeen

 MY CHANCE of attaining wealth now lay only in the claims I held. My partners and I had prospected them and found most of them worthless, but I still held dozens, either in my own right or jointly with Ed Ferguson, Whiskers and the commissioner. And my option to buy the other half of the Hidden Treasure from John Adams, the laborer, had not yet expired. I had seen Rowe loaded with hundreds of claims—so many that he never eliminated the least likely producers and concentrated on one or two showing good prospects. He was no better off now than when he had come into the country. I didn't want my Alaskan experiences to parallel his. I would have to dispose, somehow, of all but one or two of my best claims, then put all my effort into working them.

John Adams came to me. "Miss Fitz, there's a fellow who'll give me two thousand dollars for my share in our Hidden Treasure. I've fooled around with the claim all summer, without making it pay. It'll need heavy machinery, but the claim isn't large enough to support such expensive equipment. Now if you don't want to take up

your option, I wish you'd release me so I can sell out to this man."

There was three thousand dollars due on the option if I wished to take it up.

I said, "There's no way of telling just what the property will produce. I've prospected it, and, as you say, it will need large machinery to work it profitably. And if I bought machinery like that, I'd have to buy more property to work."

He nodded. "I know. It'd take at least another claim to make the equipment pay."

I had the thousand-foot fraction alongside the Hidden Treasure, but even this would not be enough. And my other claims could not be worked with heavy equipment, without moving from the Hidden Treasure and the fraction. I would need more property adjoining.

I couldn't spare the three thousand dollars, for if I were to buy heavy machinery I'd need every cent I had besides many thousands I'd try to borrow. But I also couldn't lose the Hidden Treasure. It was one of the best claims in which I had an interest. I had to buy it or operate it with a stranger. Suggestions that Adams participate in one-half of the profits from the Hidden Treasure were of no avail. He was a tired, bitterly disillusioned, homesick man. He wanted his family and his wife who waited patiently on the outside. I gave him the money.

Whiskers, Judge Ferguson and Ed agreed that the claims we still held should be prospected thoroughly and abandoned if gold in paying quantities were not found. They set to work at this before a hundred dollars in assessment work would be due, a matter of several months.

I now owned entirely by myself the Hidden Treasure, the thousand-foot fraction, which I had named the Frances; and the Mendocino, at the mouth of Ophir. A great



deal of distance lay between the two sites, and I felt that I should get rid of one of them.

I went out myself, with gold pan and shovel, and prospected the Mendocino. It showed only a few cents a pan—a goodly showing, but not as much as I hoped. Then I again tried the Hidden Treasure. One pan—the equivalent of two shovels—showed eight dollars. I tried again. Fifteen dollars. Unable to believe myself, I tried again. Twelve dollars.

John Adams had given up just a moment too soon. I had shoveled through the coarse sand—gone deeper for those first three pans. The gold lay just beneath the surface in a stratum of clay at the elbow of the stream. Gold in such a stratum was almost unheard of. But the sticky clay had gathered in that gold and held it secure against the floods which would otherwise have washed it away. Properly handled, the Hidden Treasure and the adjoining fraction, the Frances, would make me rich.

I made up my mind to dispose of every other holding. I would keep only the Hidden Treasure and the Frances, would somehow acquire adjoining property, buy heavy machinery, and concentrate on those claims. . . . I might add that later the Frances showed as much as twenty-five hundred dollars a cubic yard.

The Mendocino was a good claim, would bring rich returns if it were worked by heavy hydraulic equipment. But this would necessitate my buying expensive machinery for two separate claims—an impossible undertaking. Perhaps if I sold the Mendocino I could raise sufficient money to finance operating the Hidden Treasure and the Frances, as well as to buy adjoining claims. I determined to dispose of everything I owned in partnership and go entirely on my own. Seventy-five thousand was the price I set in my mind for the Mendocino.

My partners and I worked out arrangements for the disposal of my interest in everything we held jointly. Now I was ready to make my bid for fortune.

Others were making fortunes that year. The Wild Goose had already cleaned up over two million from its claims, and was now building a four-mile railroad from Council to Ophir creek. Previously, they had built a seven-mile railroad from Nome to Anvil. Both roads set a record for revenue produced during the first year of operation—about eighty-five thousand dollars apiece, net, for the three-and-a-half months season.

The new railroad would be completed in time for me to ship heavy machinery to Ophir in the spring. I would need a hydraulic lift, a centrifugal pump, a big gasoline engine—bigger by more than a hundred horsepower than anything else ever yet used in the district—and hundreds of feet of pipe. With this equipment, I could handle almost an unlimited number of claims, provided they adjoined each other.

The machinery would cost about fifty thousand dollars, and would require the services of many workmen, both skilled and unskilled. This would be another great expense, and I couldn't hope to operate profitably unless I acquired more claims.

Ed Dunn owned No. 10 on Ophir; Joe King owned the Last Chance and the Walburga. My claims lay between these two properties. If I could buy out either of these men, my venture into large scale mining might be profitable.

Ed Dunn would hear nothing of selling at any price. He had taken over a hundred thousand dollars from his claim that year, and wanted more. In fact, we later had a controversy over one foot of property, and finally hired surveyors to settle it, so rich was the soil. Fortunately,

the surveyors decided in my favor, which enraged Dunn so greatly he sluiced all his tailings into my claim.

Joe King had hand-sluiced the Last Chance and the Walburga, and had taken several hundred thousand dollars from them. Further profitable sluicing could be done on these claims only with the type of machinery I planned to buy. Joe was tired of Alaska and sick to death of hard work and cold and deprivation. He had all the money he could ever spend, and wanted to go outside.

I gave him a thousand dollars earnest money and bought the Last Chance and the Walburga for eighteen thousand dollars. Joe was to continue working the property until the freeze-up, and I was to take over at any time I wished after that. But the balance of seventeen thousand dollars was to be paid him in a lump sum just before the freeze-up, when he planned on leaving for the States.

I now had a string of three good claims, plus the thousand-foot Frances fraction, and I owed seventeen thousand dollars, but felt that my Mendocino claim more than offset this debt. I knew that no bank would lend me money on the claims, but felt that I could interest someone in Nome in financing me—even if it meant going to Lansing Baker, a money-lender who would take a chance for high interest. I meant to avoid him if possible, however. He was too well known as a heartless man if he ever got a borrower in his grasp.

Judge Ferguson brought me an offer of seventy-five thousand dollars from the Wild Goose people for my string of claims on the horseshoe of the Ophir, but the gold fever burned fiercely in me now, and I was out to make a fortune or nothing. The pot at the end of the rainbow lay almost within my grasp. I turned down the offer, but countered with an offer to give them the Mendocino for this price. They tested it, remained undecided for a

day or two, then finally informed me that this claim lay too far from their other properties. Both of us figuratively sat down to wait the other out. And I couldn't wait too long; seventeen thousand dollars was due Joe King before the freeze-up.

My brother Albert still remained at the claims with Ed, but I was making plans to bring him to Council for the winter. I had waited until the freeze-up approached, in the hope that Jack Underwood would think of selling the newspaper and going outside for the winter. Then I could buy it and put Albert in charge. During the winter, he could learn the business, and after the break-up, when we started mining, someone else could take charge of the paper, and Albert could manage the claims.

But Underwood had no thought of going outside or selling his newspaper. He did consent, however, to sell me a half interest and to teach Albert the business. In the long run, this arrangement would work out the best, for without Underwood there, Albert couldn't properly have learned the business.

I bought half of the paper. Later, when Underwood's genius called him to greater things, he sold me the other half, and I published the *Council City News* until 1905, when Lanier McKee's partner, Neville Castle, now a retired attorney living in California, bought me out. The *Council City News* was the world's most northerly newspaper.

None of the other large mining companies showed any interest in buying the Mendocino. I saw as many of them as I could, but the fall rush had started, and my work in the recording office kept me busy most of the time. In addition, the commissioner told me that he would resign and leave for the Far East that fall. It came as a distinct surprise. But I, too, was ending my work with the U. S.

Recording office. I submitted my resignation, effective in the spring.

Now nearly everyone who came into the office spoke of a Dr. deSoto who was supposedly staking scores of claims in the district and buying up others. I had never seen the doctor, but one of his employes may have been filing claims under someone else's name. At any rate, rumor had it that the doctor was catching one of the last boats to Nome, and would be in just before the freeze-up with his final notices. It meant more work at a time when the days weren't long enough.

The rumors concerning the doctor interested me, and I tried to run them down. But I could learn nothing definite. He was returning the following year with a dredger, two steam shovels, and other heavy equipment to outfit several large mining camps. He would outfit a complete and modern hospital in Council the next year. He was buying everything he could find for sale on Ophir creek. I wanted to find that illusive doctor—wanted desperately to sell him the Mendocino before final payment on the Last Chance and the Walburga was due. But I could locate only people who had heard things—no one who actually knew where the doctor was located.

The days drifted past in a flurry of work. My brother came to Council, and we decided that he and Underwood could take their meals in my cabin with me, and Albert would sleep in the office, on a cot which Underwood installed there.

And all the time, everyone I knew continually harped at me for turning down the seventy-five thousand dollar offer of the Wild Goose Company for my string of claims on Ophir.

"Nobody'll ever buy the Mendocino, Fizzy," urged Whiskers, who had clung to Council on my assurance that

he'd be needed when I began operations. "It'll be a long time before you get another offer like that."

"But they want my three claims and the fraction. I'll clean up three or four times that much in a season if I can get the machinery to operate them."

"But if you don't sell the Mendocino, you're liable to lose the others."

"If this Doctor deSoto's really bringing in a dredger and two steam shovels, the Mendocino will be a good proposition for him. Maybe he'll buy it, and I can use the money to pay King and buy equipment."

"Yes, but where's Doctor deSoto?"

The freeze-up became more imminent. Nights were long and cold and windy. Ice stood on the pail outside my cabin each morning. We gave a little farewell party to Judge Ferguson, and he left Council. I was sworn in as temporary U. S. Commissioner. Then the new commissioner arrived, and had to be shown the routine. Work piled up. I began sleeping and eating almost on the run.

Mr. Lane, the president of the Wild Goose, had returned from the States and sent word that his offer of seventy-five thousand would expire October tenth.

"You'd better grab it, Fannie Ella," said my brother. "You'll never have another chance like that."

"But then I wouldn't be able to go through with my plans. The claims would be gone."

"Use that money to work the Mendocino."

"It wouldn't be profitable to buy heavy equipment just for that one claim, and I'm not going to contract for expensive machinery on the chance of finding other claims."

"You know the old saying—a bird in the hand—"

"It's a good gamble, Albert. I'm going to hang on as long as I can. Maybe Doctor deSoto—"

The last boat to Nome lay in the Niukluk, ready for its trip down the river to the confluence with the Fish, and



Fizzy using a primitive rocker on dirt carrying \$1,500 to
the cubic yard on the Hidden Treasure

thence to Golofnin and the Bering Sea. Joe King's seventeen thousand must be paid within a day or two. Unless I sold the Mendocino immediately, I would be forced to accept the Wild Goose's offer and abandon my dream of a mighty enterprise.

That afternoon, a short, dark, heavily-bearded man hurried into the recording office and asked if I would record his notices in time for him to catch the boat. He placed the notices—a huge stack of them—on my desk. Dozens of other notices had accrued before his and must be recorded first.

I explained. "I don't think I can do it. The boat's about ready to leave, and all these other notices must be recorded before yours. There just isn't time."

"I'll have the boat held if you'll do the work."

I looked at the stack, then at the pile which had preceded his. Weariness was upon me and dwelt within me. I had been working fifteen to eighteen hours daily. And the amount of work which lay before me couldn't be completed in less than twenty hours.

"Would they hold the boat for you?" I asked.

"I think so, if I pay them enough."

"Is it terribly important that you take these papers outside with you?"

He assured me that it was a matter of desperation. The papers would be needed to raise money in the States during the winter. I explained just how much work was involved—how long it would take.

"I'll gladly pay you twenty dollars an hour for your time," he offered eagerly.

It was the last of the rush, and the man needed his papers—needed them probably as badly as I needed money to pay Joe King.

"That won't be necessary," I smiled. "You'd better see about holding the boat."

After he left the office, I learned from the papers that this quiet, unassuming, refined little man was the almost legendary Doctor deSoto. He and his men had staked two thousand acres on the Niukluk and its banks, and on the flat which lay across the river from Council. In addition, he had bought dozens of claims which lay within the Council District.

I worked all night on his notices, and though he dropped in from time to time, bringing me coffee or something to eat, I made no mention of the Mendocino. I would wait until the recording was completed and I could give the sale of my claim all my attention. For I knew that the doctor was a plunger and a gambler; the holding of the boat had cost him a small fortune. Now if I could interest him in my claim—

Just as I was completing the entries, Doctor deSoto returned. I did not have to broach him about buying my claim. He spoke first.

"Say, Miss Fitz, I understand you own the Mendocino."

"Yes," I said in some surprise.

Then, "You want to sell it?"

"I've thought of it."

"What price are you asking?"

"Seventy-five thousand."

"I'll give you twenty-five."

"Seventy-five is my price."

"But I'm offering you cash."

"My price is seventy-five, cash. I must have cash."

A moment of hesitation. "Well, I'm a good sport. How about you? I'll give you fifty thousand dollars, cash, right this minute."

Well.

We closed the deal, and Doctor deSoto ordered the boat

held several more hours while we drew up papers and he arranged to get the cash.

While we waited for the cash to come over, he asked my plans. "None of my business, of course," he added, "but they told me around town you had some other claims you wouldn't sell to the Wild Goose, and since you're planning to operate them yourself, I'm interested. My company's bringing in heavy machinery too, and maybe we can help each other."

I told him of the Hidden Treasure and the Frances fraction and the Last Chance and the Walburga. His eyes shone.

"I'd give a pretty sum to get hold of those claims myself. But you're on the right track, young lady. With heavy equipment, you'll clean up a fortune."

"Is it true you're going to build a hospital here, and that you're going to bring in dredgers and steam shovels and big pumps in the spring?"

He laughed. "The hospital will go up some day if things turn out right. But I'm buying the equipment and shipping it in in the spring. That's another reason why I'm going outside now." He paused, then added, "By the way, I suppose you have someone outside buying your equipment for you."

I admitted I hadn't—that I expected to order it by mail.

"But that'll never do!" he cried, excited. "You're likely to order the wrong type and lose your chance and everything you've put in it. Why not let me place your order for you, with the Fairbanks-Morse people in Chicago? Then you'll be sure of at least getting the proper equipment."

"I'll be very grateful."

"Have you any idea what it will cost to run such a plant as you'll need?"

I shook my head.

"First, you'll need a man from the factory to run the engine and the pump," he began. "You'll have to pay him, and he'll have to have competent assistants, for you'll naturally run day and night if you're to get as many clean-ups as possible during the season." He paused and smiled, muttered something about the short season being our worst enemy, then figured rapidly with pencil and paper. "I'd say offhand it would cost you in the neighborhood of two hundred dollars a day to operate, and the equipment would run about fifty thousand."

"How many days would I have to operate before I could make a clean-up?"

He shrugged. "That would depend. If you didn't have trouble, and if the equipment ran all right, you could make your first clean-up reasonably soon."

"How much money would I need in reserve for operating expenses before a clean-up?"

"I'd want at least thirty days."

Thirty days. Six thousand dollars. And if anything went wrong, my money would evaporate rapidly at two hundred dollars a day. But it was worth the chance.

His money came, and he gave me fifty thousand dollars for the Mendocino. I turned ten thousand of it back to him, as a deposit on the equipment he was to order for me—a one hundred and fifty horsepower Fairbanks and Morse gasoline engine, ten times larger than any other engine which had been in the district, a Bryan Jackson three-step centrifugal pump capable of producing three thousand gallons a minute, a corrugated iron engine house, a hydraulic lift, hundreds of feet of pipe, and other necessities. I did not realize until now that without the doctor's help I'd have been badly bewildered.

With this equipment, the doctor assured me I could handle between five hundred and seven hundred cubic

yards of dirt daily, if I could hire laborers who were capable of keeping the tailings from blocking the sluice boxes. A Fairbanks and Morse man would bring in the machinery in the spring and would contract with me to stay and operate the pump and the engine all season. The balance of forty thousand dollars due on the equipment would be payable when it arrived in Nome.

In the meantime, Jack Underwood had changed his mind and decided to sell out the other half of the paper. I bought it and turned the business over to Albert, but almost as I closed the deal with Underwood, a letter arrived from Mother, telling Albert that the case against his music publisher would be heard in court early in the winter and Albert would have to be there. I felt that the hearing was hopeless as far as Albert was concerned, but advanced him a thousand dollars for expenses. In addition I paid Joe King the seventeen thousand dollars due him. The money was going fast. Much more would be needed in the spring—thousands more than I had. There was nothing to do but go to Nome before the freeze-up and arrange for a loan, so I would surely have the money when the freight arrived.

Albert and I left Council without placing anyone in charge of the newspaper. No one in town knew anything about publishing. But I hoped to find a printer in Nome.

Albert sailed, and though I am not Catholic I contacted Father Devine, the noted priest of the Arctic, who died recently. The priest told me of a man who he thought might handle the work for me.

"He's a good man," said the Father, "if you can keep him away from liquor. He was drinking pretty hard, but for the last three months he's got hold of himself and hasn't had a drink. So, though you're taking a risk, there's a chance he may be all right."

I had to hire someone immediately or miss the next

Council City News



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Atb. H. Fitz.

Business Manager

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SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 1903.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.

With this issue the NEWS reports a dissolution of partnership between J. J. Underwood, formerly editor of this paper, and F. E. Fitz, both of whom, since October 15, have owned an equal proprietary interest in the publication.

By the terms of the deed, dated July 27, 1903, the former relinquishes to F. E. Fitz all right, title and interest in the Council City News, together with the plant, building, lot, etc. The new firm will collect all outstanding accounts, and assume all liabilities. As in the past, A. H. Fitz will be the active business manager of the concern.

Editorial announcing Fizzy's complete ownership of the Council City
News

edition. Further, I wanted to help this man in whom the priest had taken such an interest. Father Devine sent for him, and I hired him at once. He left immediately for Council City. During the time I was in Nome, I blessed the telephone system, which was now in operation. Rowe had placed the poles too close to the water, and the roar of the sea usually drowned out most of the conversation; but I could keep in touch with the paper, and learned that it was coming out on time.

Then I set about trying to borrow enough money to pay for the machinery, pay the cost of the freight, and operate the claim at two hundred dollars a day until we could make our first clean-up. It was a long, fruitless affair. The banks were not interested. Neither, apparently, was anyone else whom I approached. At last there was nothing left for me to do but go to Lansing Baker, the man who lent money at exorbitant rates.

I needed thirty thousand dollars, which, with the money I had left from my deal with Doctor deSoto, would carry me through until summer. Baker listened to my story sourly, then agreed to lend me the money until August twentieth, but only if I would give him a blanket assignment of my claims and the machinery as collateral. It meant that he could take over everything I owned, lock, stock and barrel, if I defaulted, and almost without notice. But it was my only chance. I felt that fortune lay ahead for me, and meant to push my luck just as far as I possibly could. The gold lay there in the string of claims on the Ophir. I had given myself sufficient time to make several good clean-ups. I would meet the obligation when it fell due.

I returned via Bower's new hot air wagon to Council and found that my printer had gone on a drunk two days before, had drawn all his wages and appropriated nearly five hundred dollars from the cash collections he had

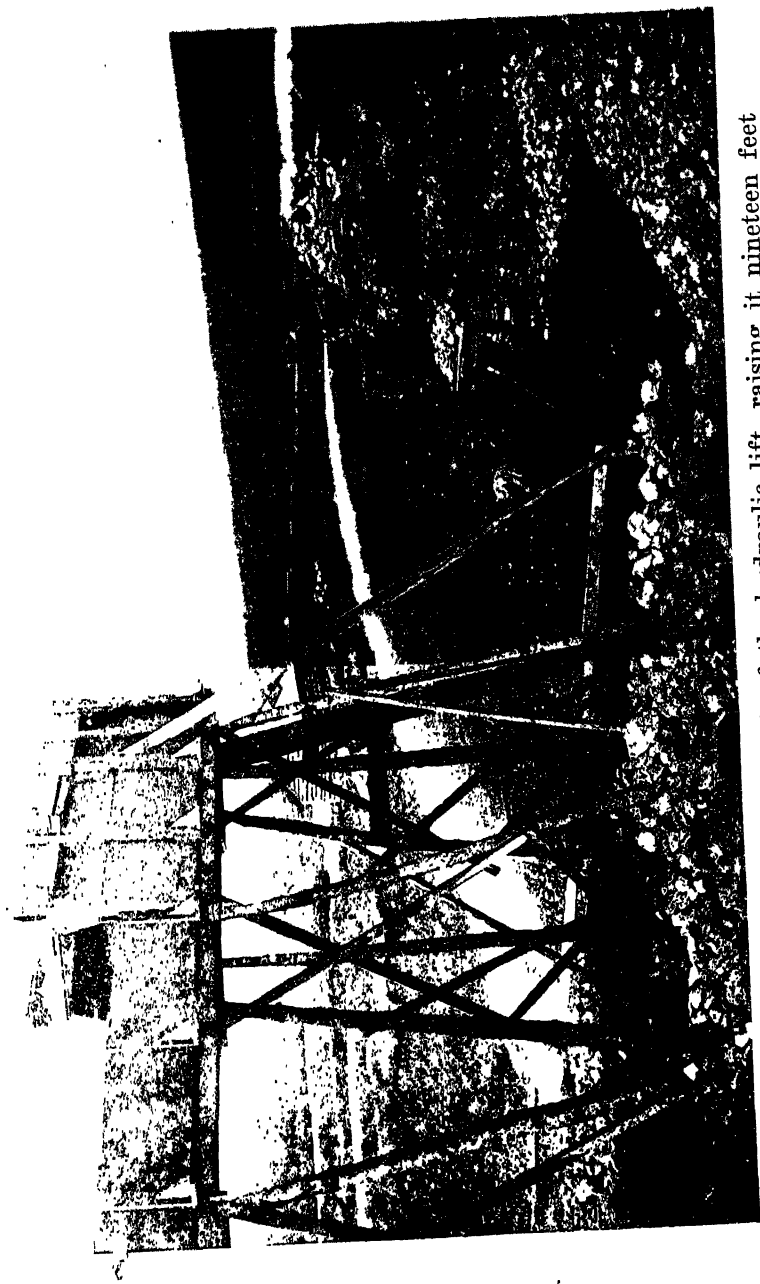
made, and disappeared. Seemingly I had hired him just as his period of good behavior was coming to an end. Father Devine came to Council and put me through a course in handsetting type, job work, writing news stories, laying out and making up ads, and editing a paper. For a time, he wrote, without a by-line, most of my copy. The Seattle and Nome papers copied it and complimented me on my ability! The Father had been an expert newspaperman before he went into the priesthood. I never gave him away. For a time, I got the paper out alone, even turning the press. Then I hired C. B. Heizer, who remained with me as long as I published the paper.

When the break-up came, I was waiting in Nome, ahead of the floods which would isolate Council for several weeks. Albert landed, full of news of his contest with his publisher. As I expected, things went badly for my brother. In the end Albert received less than five hundred dollars, after paying his attorneys.

The machinery and the factory man arrived on a later vessel. I got the thirty thousand from Baker, paid the attached bill of lading, and ordered the equipment moved to the claims. There was nothing to keep me from devoting all my energy to the new endeavor. I had given up my position in the recording office.

While I waited for the machinery to start for the Ophir, I inquired into the success of the telephone system. About a hundred and fifty people in Nome had phones, with more being installed all the time. The system was an assured success from the beginning. Later I learned that the operators sold stock, and this stock paid twenty-five per cent on the dollar in the first year! But only temporarily did I bemoan the luck which had ousted me from the line. I was on the trail of something even bigger.

After paying the bill of lading, the enormous freight bill to Ophir, and other incidentals, I had only about



Piping pay dirt into the mouth of the hydraulic lift, raising it nineteen feet

enough money to carry me until the first clean-up. But I was always drawn ahead by great visions of success in the near future. The Wild Goose had been closing down for clean-ups every five days. And in their sluice boxes they had found, at each clean-up, between ten and fifty thousand dollars. I hoped that I could do a quarter as well.

But the work of installing the machinery progressed slowly. Something was continually delaying us. First, there was the sump hole to be drilled. This sump must supply an almost unlimited source of water, for the pump would draw it off and shoot it into the hydraulic lift at the rate of three thousand gallons a minute. Laborers had to be hired, a difficult task at this season when there was always a shortage of good men. And we needed good men to work in the pit and at the end of the sluice boxes, where the tailings would grow mountainous and block production if they were not constantly cleared away. Our success or failure depended upon the quick removal of those tailings.

Weeks passed. It seemed that we would never get started. Then on August tenth we were ready, and went into production. I hoped for our first clean-up in five days, but the engine, which was supposed to run day and night, stopped almost hourly while the tailings were cleared away. I slept in a cabin nearby and attuned my ears to the stroke of the engine. Whenever it stopped, which was often, I automatically awoke and jumped into my shoes and rushed to the engine house to investigate.

We had been running intermittently nine days when I ordered a clean-up. This was August nineteenth. My note to Baker was due the following day.

We shut down the engine and gathered the dirt which had fallen through the riffles into the boxes. Carefully we cleaned it for gold, knowing even before we weighed it

that the amount fell far short of our needs. The boys placed it on the scales. So much gold at so much an ounce—around nineteen dollars, in those days. Our clean-up amounted to a little over five thousand dollars.

When Baker appeared the next morning, I told him of my predicament and offered him the five thousand on account.

He shook his head. "It's all or none, Miss Fitz."

"You mean you won't even extend my note?"

"You agreed to pay me today. I'm here for my money."

"But I haven't got it. Won't have it for several weeks at the rate we're running."

"I can't wait that long, Miss Fitz."

"I'll pay additional interest."

"I still couldn't wait that long."

"You mean you're going to take over everything without even giving me another chance?" He merely looked at me with the cold eye of an executioner. "I'll give you two thousand dollars bonus if you'll extend my note another six weeks."

In the end, he agreed to extend the note one week, and one week only, upon payment of the five thousand dollars and the bonus I had suggested. I had no alternative but to accede.

After he left, I stormed at my foreman, Mack MacLaughlin. "Something has to be done, Mack. We've got to take nearly thirty thousand dollars out of this claim within seven days."

He shook his head. "We can't make it. We shut down too often."

"We'll have to eliminate the shut-downs."

"The men can't move the tailings fast enough. The stuff keeps piling up to the sluice boxes."

"The gold is there," I said, "and if we can keep running twenty-four hours a day, we can get it out in time."

"I'll do the best I can," was all he could promise.

I told Whiskers, who had waited around all winter and supervised operations, the predicament which now faced us.

He said, "I think I know the answer."

I looked at him hopefully.

"It's those laborers we've got. They lay down on the job. If they'd keep the tailings clean, the engine would never have to shut down."

Labor was scarce. If we so much as hinted that they weren't keeping up, they'd quit in a huff, claim we were a bunch of slave-drivers, and we'd be unable to hire other workers to take their places. Capital has its troubles now, but we had trouble with labor then as well.

Whiskers had been squinting at our men and their efforts with the shovels.

"There's only one thing to do," he decided. "I'll go to Council and scare up a team of horses. Then we'll put a scraper on that tailing pile. We'll all pitch in, every one of us—the foreman, your brother, me, everybody. We'll take men from the pit and put them on tailings. You can relieve at the nozzle. Then if we can keep the pump going and the tailings clear, the gold may be there when we clean up next time."

The following week was a nightmare. I relieved at the nozzle of the hose, which swept the sand into the hydraulic lift and exposed bedrock. The pressure was terrific. My hands blistered, my arms ached, and my back felt as though it were broken.

The hose would sluice the pay dirt into the opening through which three thousand gallons of water raced every minute. The force of the water elevated the pay dirt to the sluice boxes and the riffles high above the workings. Here the water and the sand and the stones and the rocks passed through the sluice boxes, and the gold fell

into the riffles and was trapped. The water and mud and stones and dirt then passed from the overhead sluice boxes—long wooden trough-like affairs which look like a raised narrow-gauge near a coal elevator—and dropped onto the tailing heap. It had been this heap which had risen so fast it blocked the sluice boxes, causing us to shut down until the tailings were cleared away.

The men, now continually goaded by the foreman, Whiskers, Albert and me, couldn't shirk a moment. And the big scraper, drawn by the horses, hauled away the tailings a cubic yard at a time. Once the tailing pile was cleared, we kept the pump going continually.

The week passed in a roar of water and a clatter of stones over the riffles of the sluice boxes and a clank of machinery. I was wet continually, but couldn't even take time to dry myself.

We kept the work going to the last possible moment. When Baker arrived for his money on the twenty-seventh, we had stopped the pump and were starting with the clean-up. My brother and Whiskers carried the heavy gold to the office, where they cleaned it and started weighing it out, a long, slow, tedious task.

The office was very still. I heard the thumping of my heart—felt whiteness creeping across my cheeks.

Then Albert's voice said, "It's a little better than two thousand ounces, as close as I can make it."

Two thousand ounces. Nearly forty thousand dollars!


Baker took gold in payment and disappointedly left the claims.

During the following years, we cleaned up many times, but my thrill of that day in August, when Baker stood in the office, waiting to take over my claims and machinery, was never repeated.

I like to look back across nearly forty years and see us all standing tensely in the rude little office—my brother,

Mack, Baker, Whiskers, two or three others. Then my brother's words, and the surge of relief. But best of all I remember Whiskers, dirty and worn and exhausted, but not too tired to flash me an impish smile—a smile that said, “Look at this chit of a Manhattan stenographer who dreamed mighty dreams of a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, then went out and found it!”

Epilogue

 MOST readers wanted to know three more things after they finished the manuscript of this story: How much money did Miss Fitz earn in Alaska? How long did she live there? What has she been doing since that time?

Miss Fitz netted over one hundred thousand dollars in gold from the Ophir creek claims. She continued to operate until 1906; and during the intervening years she made several trips to the States.

In 1906, Faust died of old age in Seattle, and the *Daily Times*, of May 3, carried the story under the heading FAUST, A FAMOUS DOG, PASSES AWAY. He received fitting burial.

In this same year, while Miss Fitz was visiting in Boston, she ran into Old Man Dow, looking very pert and neat and chipper, on the street. Dow was at that time connected with a firm interested in the cranberry industry. One of his partners was Eugene Sanger.

Miss Fitz accepted an invitation to luncheon, where she met Eugene Sanger's younger brother John. This brother was to go to Alaska, to investigate some placer

mining property. He wanted whatever information Miss Fitz could give him regarding the properties.

John Sanger's interest turned from Alaska to Frances Ella Fitz. They were married seventeen days later in New York City. Fizzy could make up her mind quickly!

Fannie Ella and John Sanger returned to Alaska that spring, but John announced flatly, after three months of the country, that he wouldn't stay there for all the gold in the world. Consequently Fizzy turned her back on the barren land she had grown to love—turned her back on the rich claims of Ophir creek and the little cabin at Council. At last report, dredgers were working these claims, and since 1906 they have earned an enormous fortune for Mrs. Sanger's successors. The little cabin, which she left without even locking the door, is still hers and for all she knows still stands there on the banks of the Niukluk.

—Jerome Odlum

